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SENSING EXPERIENCES:
VOICES OF THE BEREAVED

by

GWENYTH OLIVE WINDSOR ©

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled SENSING EXPERIENCES: VOICES OF THE BEREAVED submitted by GWENYTH OLIVE WINDSOR in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in Counselling Psychology.

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Abstract

As a normal part of grief, the bereaved often report having "sensing experiences" in which they perceive the presence of the deceased. In this study, the experiences of seven bereaved individuals were explored from a hermeneutic phenomenological perspective. The purpose of the study was to gain insight into the nature of the experience and its effects on the grief process. Sensing experiences were found to be most healing when the following interpretations of experience were made: (1) that the well-being of the deceased was assured; (2) that the deceased cared for the survivor; (3) that interpersonal issues had been resolved or no longer mattered; and (4) that the connection between the survivor and the deceased was ongoing. Specific dimensions were identified in which experiences facilitated healing and spiritual growth. Implications for counselling and for future research are discussed.

Dedication

A special dedication to my Mom for your gentleness, your desire that we do our best, and for all the songs. To my Dad for being my hero, and for inspiring a love of learning that has made life endlessly fascinating. To both of you, Mom and Dad, my love; you may pass on before me but you will be, as long as I live, sources of inspiration, strength and love. Thank you for living with joy in times of peace, and courage in times of difficulty. You taught us that, when you have laughter and love, anything can be overcome. No matter what, we always had fun. And there was never a time when I wasn't sure of your love and support, and your belief in me.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The Experience of Perceiving the Presence of the Dead

As a normal part of grief, the bereaved often report having experiences in which they perceive the presence of the deceased. Experiences can seem very real to the bereaved and usually happen within days of the loss, at a time when the survivor wants nothing more than to have one last moment with the one mourned. These experiences are of importance to psychologists because they may profoundly effect the way survivors respond during the grief process. The potential impact of such an experience is illustrated by the following description which was reported by one man following the death of a young friend:

> *I saw this big round light, this radiant-like-a-sun light. But in the center of it was this big glow. I guess you'd say like a tunnel of light. It went for a long ways back. It was the center part that was the tunnel but there was also glowing light all around it. The center part was bright and more pronounced.*
>
> *It was just. . .his face more or less. . .and it was glowing all around him. . .[makes hand motions in lines outward from his own face]. . . .It was a yellowy light. . .and the eyes were smiling. . .a big smile on his face. . . .He didn't say anything but. . . .I had the overwhelming feeling that he was happy. . .*
>
> *After the vision I was not sad at all. I was crying about it but I was happy. . . .You have mixed feelings. . .you're sad because of what happened to him. Yet, I'm happy for him because I know he's okay.*
>
> *I haven't gone around telling people about it. . . .I have the feeling somebody might have the feeling that. . .oohh, he's out in left field someplace. . .he's been drinking. . . .I don't take any medication and I very seldom drink alcohol.*
>
> *After I had seen him go there, I wasn't sad about him dying. I was happy for him. Maybe it's just my mind doing this to me to help me cope with it. I don't know. But it worked. Definitely worked. . . .And maybe it really did happen. This I don't know either. Nobody can tell us. At the time it seemed very real to me.*

This experience clearly had a profound and immediate effect on this man's grief process. This brief description, however, does not capture in any depth the ongoing meaning that was attached to the experience, the process by which the experience was integrated, nor the way in which grief was attenuated by the experience. Although experts regard the phenomenon as a component of normal grieving (American Psychological Association, 1994; Rando, 1995; Rees, 1971, 1981), the above dimensions of experience are not available in the academic literature on normal grieving. There is, in fact, little mention of the phenomenon in the literature related to coping with grief or counselling the bereaved.

It is known the experiences, usually identified as "sensing experiences," may be visual (seeing the deceased), auditory (hearing the deceased), tactile (being touched by the deceased), intuitive (consisting of a distinct inner awareness of the presence of the deceased), or olfactory (smelling a fragrance associated with the deceased and clearly out of context with the surroundings, Rees, 1971). It is also known that the experiences are reported by a large proportion of those grieving significant losses. Roughly half of those who have lost a spouse report these perceptions (Ball, 1977; Marris, 1958; Parkes, 1972; Rees, 1971); they are also common for those who have lost a sibling (Balk, 1983) or a child (Morse, 1994; Weiner, Akin, Gibbons, & Hirshfeld, 1996). As will be demonstrated in the following section, there is also ample evidence that those who experience the presence of the deceased might benefit from psychotherapeutic counselling.

Benefits of Intervention

The bereaved often profit from an opportunity to discuss their experiences and to learn they are common during grief (Rees, 1981). Rees observed that the climate of opinion in modern Western culture discourages people from disclosing to others "one of the most interesting and important experiences in their life [lives]" and that they are often happier after having learned their experiences are not uncommon.

The bereaved may fear that their experiences are a symptom of insanity. The "climate of opinion," referred to above, which discourages disclosure, is presumably related to the labelling of these experiences as hallucinatory; often hallucinations are associated with psychopathology. Grimby's (1992) findings support the idea that people are reluctant to disclose experiences for this reason. Although more than half of the fourteen men and almost all of the thirty-six women in his sample reported sensing experiences, only one such report was given spontaneously. Grimby observed that most spoke freely of their experiences only after they had been informed that post-bereavement hallucinations and illusions are common and normal. They also expressed relief, having thought they "might become or be considered insane" (p.76). This is at a time when the intensity of grief reactions may already have prompted worries about being "crazy" (Kalish, 1981; Marris, 1958; Rando, 1995).

Avoidance of this topic may leave the bereaved feeling isolated and alone at a time when, according to many experts (Attig, 1996; Parkes, 1972; Rando, 1992) one of the most important factors in recovery is social support. In light of worry about being thought "crazy" such avoidance would be understandable. However, because grief is already a time of loneliness, further isolation of the kind described by Jung (1961) could be particularly painful:

> The consequence of my. . .involvement with things which neither I nor anyone else could understand, was an extreme loneliness. I was going about laden with thoughts of which I could speak to no one: they would only have been misunderstood. I felt the gulf between the external world and the interior world of images in its most painful form. . . . (1961, 194-195).

Thus, clients, who might be expected to feel hesitant in disclosing their experiences to their therapists or who might easily abandon the topic if initially met with a lack of understanding, may experience loneliness at a time when they most need support. In this way the therapeutic process could be compromised and an opportunity to provide assistance wasted.

People may need help in adjusting emotionally to having experienced this phenomenon. Morse (1994) has observed that experiences like these (sensing experiences, death-bed visions, near-death experiences) precipitate a spiritual emergency (p.141). At worst people may find the phenomenon frightening, at best, wonderful; either way, emotional adjustment will be necessary as they reassess their lives and goals (p.141). Morse further notes that family members have difficulty with the question of why some family members have these "death-related visitations" while others do not, and observes that the visions "can lead to further family chaos as different value judgments and spiritual interpretations are placed on the experience" (p.142).

Understanding of sensing experiences may potentially lead to counsellor insights into the grieving process of the bereaved. Lindstrom (1995) found that adaptation to bereavement could be predicted from the nature of the sensing experience. Poor adaptational outcomes tended to be associated with those who viewed the experiences as "extremely positive" or "extremely negative" while good outcomes were associated with those who viewed their experiences as "neutral to slightly positive experiences" (p.11). Liebermann's (1987) advice is also pertinent here. He reminds us that while hallucinatory experiences seem to be found in normal grieving they may also be associated with depression, precipitation of mania (Rickarby, 1977) and onset of schizophrenia (Brown & Birley, 1968).

If these perceptual experiences are conceived of as material from the subconscious, they may be regarded as useful raw material for exploration in therapy. Jung (1961), in describing his own visual experiences, presents a convincing argument for using them to promote insight into subconscious processes. He suggests that there is always wealth in abundance in such inner experiences, that "when no answer comes from within to the problems and complexities of life, they ultimately mean very little. . . .I can understand myself only in light of inner happenings" (p.194-195). For those who understand the language of symbol and image, these raw materials can be invaluable tools for therapeutic intervention.

This phenomenon is being mentioned in self-help and popular literature (Devers, 1997; Kubler-Ross, 1995; Martin, 1997; McCarthy, 1988; Moody, 1993, 1996); *it may, therefore, be a topic which clients raise for discussion.* Sensing experiences are receiving some attention in self-help literature concerning death and dying (Kubler-Ross, 1995), and on coping with grief (Kuklin, 1994; McCarthy, 1988). Anecdotal accounts are common in popular literature. They are identified, according to the perspectives of the authors, as ADCs, or after-death communications (LaGrande, 1997; Guggenheim & Guggenheim, 1996), as DRVs, or death-related visitations (Morse, 1994), as ghost stories (Christensen, 1996; Smith, 1993), as angel encounters (Goldman, 1995), as evidence of life after death (Harpur, 1991), or simply as inspirational stories (Canfield & Hansen, 1995; Ford, 1998). One author has reported having ongoing communication with her son in a book entitled Stephen Lives! (Puryear, 1996). Furthermore, recent research aimed at recreating this kind of experience, in order to study the phenomenon under controlled conditions and in order to facilitate grief resolution, has been well-publicized (Moody, 1993, 1996). Consequently, counsellors may be faced with clients who want to know more about these experiences, and/or clients who have accessed or are interested in accessing this process. Thus, professionals would do well to be informed at least to the degree of knowing how people process spontaneous experiences.

Meaning Attribution and Its Pertinence to Counselling

It is clear from the above discussion that intervention would often be beneficial; however, intervention begins with an understanding of how the bereaved respond to sensing experiences. Although existing descriptions of the phenomenon are commonly brief, it is apparent from the following examples that, for at least some of the bereaved, meanings attributed to these experiences might be expected to influence the grief and recovery process. Furthermore, such descriptions suggest specific questions regarding the grief process. Unless otherwise specified, the following quotations are taken from Guggenheim & Guggenheim (1996), who have collected 3,300 anecdotal reports of sensing experiences from 2,000 people in the United States and Canada (p.19).

Feelings of peace, comfort, and fear have been described. Are such feelings fleeting, or do they persist throughout the grief process and influence recovery outcomes?

> It was just like somebody had poured warm sunshine on me. I had this absolutely peaceful feeling, and I could let go (p.64).
>
> I felt very comforted by this -- I felt wonderful! It was like fifty pounds had been lifted off my chest (p. 72).
>
> I was terrified! I was scared out of my gourd! I screamed and started crying uncontrollably and ran out of the room and down the stairs. I was in a blind panic! My mother heard all this commotion and met me at the foot of the stairs, but I couldn't even talk (p.204).
>
> Well, all I did was scream! He scared the daylights out of me! And the more I screamed, the more he said, "It's okay, Charlotte. It's okay. It's okay (p.205).

In the fear reactions described above, and in the following descriptions, there are indications that some individuals might react negatively to sensing experiences. Do these experiences have the potential to complicate rather than facilitate the grief process?

> I wanted to hear from Joe again. I've waited for something, and yet there hasn't been any communication in all this time, which is over ten years (p.169).

> I was stunned by this experience. It was beautiful, but I really didn't know what to make of it at the time (p.117).

> I thought, "This is crazy! If I tell people this happened, they will think I'm strange. Months went by before I mentioned this experience to anyone, including my wife. But I mulled it over in my mind constantly (p. 207).

What is it about some experiences that people are convinced they are "incredible," "profound," "very real"? Do these convictions endure to influence the grief process in some way?

> This is as vivid in my memory as if it happened ten minutes ago. It was a very profound experience, a wonderful gift (p.76).

> I will stand up against any skeptic that this was a very real incident (p.81).

How is the grief process effected by attributions of those who have had the experience and by attributions of those around them?

> This was God's way of showing me that death doesn't stop love, and it doesn't take away relationships (p.82).

> I had a warm feeling for days after. I know it must have been an apparition – but it was the most realistic one I have ever known. I speak to him and feel he guides me in many things (Harpur, p.27).

> I am not a religious person and would love to hear an explanation as I'm sure nobody believes me (p.31).

> Sometimes you'll get the feeling that. . .maybe a peaceful feeling that's in the room, and I feel like maybe he's looking down or he's around spiritually. I feel like he's there. I think you have that feeling because you're so close to them, and I don't think you want to turn loose of the idea that they're actually gone forever, that they're not coming back (Schucter & Zisook, 1988).

On the basis of such descriptions, it would seem that this phenomenon, as it relates to the counselling process, consists not only of the perception of presence, but also of the ongoing thoughts and feelings attached to that experience. As Giorgi (1989) suggests, "the attribution of meanings in experience is so intrinsic that any ignoring of it would violate the experience being explained" (p.109). I am interested, therefore, in identifying the phenomenon within the broad context of the grief process and as it includes meaning attribution. When this research began, I had found only one piece of research which meets the above criteria. In this research, however, Conant (1996) focusses on inner representations of the deceased; memories and sensing experiences are considered together and thus clarity regarding sensing experiences is lost.

Purpose

Given the current paucity of research regarding sensing experiences as they include meaning attribution, it is clear that research in this area is needed. Evidence that interventions are indicated includes findings of a high incidence of reports of sensing experiences among the bereaved, and observations that such experiences may precipitate fears of insanity (Rees, 1971; Grimby, 1993), familial difficulties (Morse, 1994), and/or spiritual crises (Morse, 1994). Such interventions would be facilitated if counsellors understand this phenomenon and its possible impact both on the grieving process and on its resolution. As Colaizzi states:

> Without. . .disclosing the foundations of a phenomenon, no progress whatsoever can be made concerning it, not even a first faltering step can be taken towards it by science or by any other kind of cognition (as cited in Valle & Halling, 1989, p.28).

The purpose of the current study, therefore, is (1) to gain an understanding of how people perceive and react to sensing experiences; (2) to gain an understanding of the thoughts and feelings of experiencers; (3) to investigate whether thoughts and feelings are limited to the experience itself or if they arise throughout the grief process, perhaps affecting the individual's course of recovery; (4) to investigate whether sensing experiences have an impact on the individuals' worldview; and, finally, (5) to see how these experiences fit into the whole grief process.

In considering these goals, a single research question is proposed, "What is the lived-experience of perceiving the presence of the deceased during grief?" It is assumed, in framing this question, that meaning attribution and its effect on the grief process is considered to be part of the experience. In approaching this research, I was not interested in establishing whether or not these experiences were "real" in any objective sense. Rather, I hoped that, by allowing participants to share their stories, perhaps commonalities of experience would emerge, and it would be possible to understand the meanings people attach to their experiences. To enrich understandings gained from interviews, material from other sources including literature and film has been incorporated. In keeping with descriptive and interpretive goals and a focus on lived-experience, research was guided by hermeneutic phenomenological traditions. I anticipate that the findings will have implications for counselling in bereavement and for theoretical understanding of the nature of the sensing experience and the grief process.

In the following chapter, the psychological literature on grief and on sensing experiences is reviewed. In Chapter Three concerns are addressed regarding choice of a research design suitable for approaching this question. In Chapter Four the focuss is on the importance of meanings assigned by the survivor to the life of the deceased and to the relationship with the deceased. The grief processes of participants are explored in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six a concept of woundedness is presented. The circumstances under which sensing experiences were reported to occur, and the qualities of sensing experiences, are examined in Chapter Seven. The place of these experiences within the whole grief process is explored in Chapter Eight. In Chapters Four to Eight, examples from participants are central, but, in order to expand understandings, themes are also discussed as they appear in psychological literature, in popular literature, and in film. Reflections on the implications of findings are addressed in the final chapter.

Chapter Two

SENSING EXPERIENCES AND GRIEF IN PSYCHOLOGICAL LITERATURE

The sensing experience, or the experience of perceiving the presence of the dead, takes place within the context of the grief experience. A review of the major theories of grief, and of the literature related to sensing experiences, is included in this chapter in order to provide perspectives from which these experiences may be understood.

Perceiving the Presence of the Dead: Pathological or Functional?

Because current theories of grief can more easily be understood in light of earlier conceptualizations, theories are traced from that of Freud through those which seem to provide the stepping stones along the way to present viewpoints. In the interests of brevity, the theories discussed have been somewhat arbitrarily chosen to represent those steps; the survey is not meant to be exhaustive.

Traditionally, theories of grief have focussed on recovery as letting go of the deceased (Freud, 1917; Lindemann, 1944; Marris, 1958). In that milieu, sensing experiences could easily be viewed as pathological. Recently, however, bereavement experts have begun to see a value in continuing relationship with the deceased as part of normal grieving (Klass, 1996; Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Stroebe et al, 1996). The major theories of grief seem in general to follow a continuum from a stance of expecting efficiency in grieving and letting go (Freud, 1917/1961; Lindemann, 1944; Marris, 1958) to one which is more tolerant of continuing relationship with the deceased, of individual differences in grieving (Hays, Kasl, & Jacobs, 1994; Rando, 1995: Worden, 1991), and of longer durations of grief (Bowlby, 1980; Klass, 1996; Rosenblatt, 1996). There is also an increasing recognition of the complexity of factors affecting grief. Some of these changes may be related to real changes in patterns of grieving brought on by major social, cultural, and technological changes in our society which are increasingly compromising the individual's ability to accommodate to loss (see Rando, 1992).

Freud: Recovery as Letting Go / Sensing of Presence as Wish-Psychosis

Freud (1917/1961) identified four features of mourning: (1) a profoundly painful dejection; (2) loss of interest in the outside world, insofar as it does not recall the dead one; (3) loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love, which would mean a replacing of the one mourned; and (4) turning from any active effort that is not connected with thoughts of the dead. Grief work was seen as a struggle between reality, in which the loved one no longer existed, and the withdrawal from reality, which was characterized by an unwillingness to let go. For recovery to be complete all libido attachments to the object needed to be withdrawn. Energy would need to be exclusively devoted to grieving with nothing left over for other purposes. Every single memory or hope which bound the bereaved to the deceased had to be brought up and hypercathected. With the completion of mourning the ego became free and uninhibited again (p.153-154). Such a theoretical stance would seem to disallow a view of sensing experiences as part of healthy grieving because such experiences focus survivors on connection rather than detachment. Although Freud did not specifically refer to sensing experiences, the following description suggests that he regarded them as pathological:

> This struggle can be so intense that a turning away from reality ensues, the object being clung to through the medium of a hallucinatory wish-psychosis. The normal outcome is that deference for reality gains the day. Nevertheless its behest cannot be at once obeyed. The task is now carried through bit by bit, under great expense of time and cathectic energy, while all the time existence of the lost object is continued in the mind (p.154).

Lindemann: Sensing of Presence as "Bordering on Pathology"

Lindemann (1944) did not depart radically from Freud's (1917/1961) position, however, his work reflects the richness of his study of survivors of victims of fire in a night club in Boston. He observed that the picture of persons experiencing acute grief was "remarkably uniform." His description is still widely quoted and considered accurate, but more important is its immediacy; it is precise and personal and, therefore, tells us more about the grief experience than any number of clinical descriptors:

> Sensations of somatic distress occurring in waves lasting from twenty minutes to an hour at a time, a feeling of tightness in the throat, choking with shortness of breath, need for sighing, and an empty feeling in the abdomen, lack of muscular power, and an intense subjective distress described as tension or mental pain (p.141).

Five typical responses in the process of normal grief were observed: (1) somatic distress; (2) preoccupation with the image of the deceased; (3) guilt; (4) hostility towards friends and relatives; and (5) remarkable changes in activity and conduct (tasks effortful and meaningless; restlessness, aimlessness, and an inability to sit still; habits of social interaction seemingly lost). A sixth response, concerning identification, was not considered part of normal grief but was identified, rather, as a response "for those bordering on pathology" (p.142), and will be discussed further while addressing Lindemann's findings concerning sensing experiences. Grief was prolonged, Lindemann concluded, by avoidance of expressing emotion and avoidance of intense distress; a correlation was also observed between duration of grief and the success with which grief work was carried out.

For Lindemann (1944), as for Freud (1917/1961), detachment was required for recovery. Lindemann's expectations were stringent; he proposed that, in the context of eight to ten therapeutic interviews in which the psychiatrist shares the patient's grief work, a period of from four to six weeks was required for uncomplicated grief work. The consequences of not recovering according to schedule can only be imagined. Lindemann noted that shock therapy was sometimes effective "in instances of severe depressive reactions which defy all efforts of psychotherapy" (p.147).

It is obvious, from the examples which follow, that experiences of presence were included in survivors' "preoccupation with the image of the deceased". One patient visualized his daughter in a telephone booth calling him. A second, a forty year old woman had a vivid visual image of her husband's presence. And a third, a young navy pilot, ate and talked over problems with a lost friend; his experiences persisted at 6 months. Lindemann observed that, "some patients are much concerned about this aspect of their grief reaction because they feel it indicates approaching insanity" (p.142). Lindemann's view of sensing experiences may be understood in the context of the sixth response to acute grief referred to earlier; those who displayed this response he labelled as "bordering on pathology":

> It seemed a regular observation in these patients that the painful preoccupation with the image of the deceased. . .was transformed into preoccupation with symptoms or personality traits of the lost person, but now displaced to their own bodies and activities by identification (Lindemann, 1944, p.142).

Bowlby and Parkes: Sensing Experiences Normalized

The theories of Bowlby (1982) and Parkes (1972) are considered together here because both are informed by a study of ethology, and because both represent a movement toward positions in which sensing experiences could be accepted as part of normal grieving. Bowlby based his understanding of grief in his conceptualization of attachment behavior. He concluded that attachment behavior was functional for individuals in serving to attain or maintain easy access to specific others known to be ready and willing to come to their aid. While the behavior was most obvious in early childhood, it was observable throughout the life cycle, especially in emergencies (pp.668-669). Bowlby observed that the mourning of healthy adults followed the sequence of responses characterizing separation anxiety in young children: protest, despair, and detachment (p.672). This sequence of responses coincide with the final three stages of Parkes and thus will be considered in the following discussion.

Parkes theory (1972) grew out of a longitudinal study of twenty-two London widows. He concluded that grief was not a static set of symptoms but a linear process with four successive "clinical pictures which blend into and replace one another": numbness, pining, depression, and recovery. Although Parkes did not specifically seek information on sensing experiences, they were reported by ten out of twenty-one widows in his sample and his theory accommodates them as an integral part of the second stage. Pining was characterized by a "persistent and obtrusive wish for" the deceased person and an accompanying urge to search for the lost object. This stage, comparable to Bowlby's (1982) phase of yearning and protest, is characterized by severe anxiety and psychological pain. "The person is strongly missed and the survivor sobs or cries aloud for him (Parkes, p.39)." The comparable reaction in animals was described as follows:

> Members of lower species protest at the loss of a loved object and do all in their power to seek and recover it; hostility, externally directed, is frequent; withdrawal, rejection of a potential new object, apathy and restlessness are the rule (Bowlby, 1961).

This kind of behavior would make it more likely the lost one would be found and, thus, was considered by both Bowlby (1982) and Parkes (1972) to be valuable for survival. Anger was understood in terms of impermanent loss in which it served to discourage future behaviors which would result in loss of proximity. It could also be understood as a behavior which would serve to distance those distracting the survivor from searching. The experience of perceiving the presence of the deceased was thus explained as functional in the context of searching behaviors where maintaining "a clear visual memory of the lost person facilitated the search and made recovery more likely" (p.49). This explanation accommodated other components of grief commonly seen at this stage: alarm, tension and a high state of arousal; restless movement; preoccupation with thoughts of the lost person; loss of interest in other matters which normally occupy attention; an orientation towards places where the lost person is likely to be; calling for the person (p.46). Thus, the behavior Lindemann (1944) described as "restlessness, inability to sit still, moving about in an aimless fashion," fit neatly into Parkes' (1972) theory:

> The bereaved person seldom admits to 'having so irrational an aim' and his behavior is therefore regarded by others, and usually by himself, as 'aimless'. His search for 'something to do' is bound to fail because the things he can do are not, in fact, what he wants to do at all. What he wants is to find the lost person (p.47).

The sensing experience, a phenomenon viewed as an indication of pathology by both Freud (1917/1961) and Lindemann (1944), has thus been explained as functional. Nevertheless, Bowlby (1980), identified conditions in which he regarded sensing experiences as maladaptive (p.99). That is, when the deceased person was located within the self and resulting behavior was incompatible with capacities or interests, when the deceased in located within another person in a way that was damaging to that person, or in some cases where the deceased was located within a physical object. He regarded these mislocations as pathological except where they were transient. Bowlby also identified conditions under which sensing experiences were compatible with favorable outcomes and concluded that detachment was not necessary for recovery:

> Failure to recognize that a continuing sense of the dead person's presence, either as a constant companion or in some specific and appropriate location, is a common feature of healthy mourning has led to some confused theorizing. . . .Indeed, findings in regard both to the high prevalence of a continuing sense of presence of the dead person and its

> compatibility with favorable outcome gives no support to Freud's well-known and already quoted passage: "Mourning has a quite precise psychical task to perform: its function is to detach the survivor's memories and hopes from the dead." (p.100).

Worden: Tolerance of Continued Connection

Worden's theory (1991) is included here both because it is pertinent to the study of sensing experiences and because his work represented a shift in approach to grief work. The thrust of Worden's work was toward utility. In moving away from the phases of Bowlby (1982) and Parkes (1972) and taking a task-based approach, Worden's intention was to empower the counsellor by giving focus for intervention, and the griever by providing specific tasks to take the place of passive endurance. Worden identified four specific tasks which were necessary to complete in order to achieve resolution of grief:

Task I: To accept the reality of the loss. Acceptance of this reality may be proceeded by denial of the reality of the facts of the loss, the meaning of the loss, or the irreversibility of the loss (Dorpat as cited in Worden, p.10). Conversely, Lindemann believed that the loss may be minimized or memory of the person blocked. In conjunction with this task that Worden discusses perceived presence of the dead, expressing views compatible with Parkes's (1972) theory. He explains sensing experiences as "the cognitive counterpart to the experience of yearning" and observes that, especially for a time shortly after death, the grieving person may think the deceased is somehow still in current time and space (p.26).

Task II: To work through the pain [and anger] of grief. Worden theorizes that if physical, emotional, and behavioral pain are not acknowledged, and worked through, pain will manifest through symptoms or aberrant behavior (p.12). He observes a tendency in survivors to avoid this task, both to avoid pain and dysphoria and because society stigmatizes grief and people commonly seek to distract survivors from their grief.

Task III: To adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing. According to Worden survivors must, if necessary, adjust their sense of the world. When fundamental values and beliefs are challenged, Worden observes, survivors search for meaning in the loss in order to regain a sense of control.

Task IV: To emotionally relocate the deceased and move on with life. Originally, the fourth task involved letting go and reinvesting in another relationship.

Worden's (1991) theory was included here because his revision of Task IV reflects a shift in tolerance toward continued connection which may be necessary if theorists are to recognize the beneficial aspects of sensing experiences. For Worden, however, this shift is not complete. He asserts that "mourning is finished when a person can reinvest his or her emotions back into life and in the living" (p.17). But the ability to form new attachments seems to rest, for Worden, on the ability to let go of past attachments. He states, "The fourth task is hindered by holding on to the past attachment rather than going on and forming new ones (p.17)."

Worden's (1991) discussion of sensing experiences is mainly concerned with the idea that they may result in the bereaved thinking the deceased is somehow still in current time and space (p.26). There is no exploration of the healing aspects of this or other interpretations on the grief process.

Klass and Colleagues: Continuing Relationship with Deceased as Healthy

Klass (1996) has not claimed to have yet evolved a fully developed theory of grief. However, his ideas are enlightening and pertinent to the development of a philosophical stance on sensing experiences. Central to his thesis is the idea of an inner representation. According to Klass, the bereaved interact with inner representations of the dead. Phenomena which indicate such interactions include:

> . . .a sense of presence, hallucinations in any of the senses, belief in the [person's] continuing active influence on thoughts or events, or a conscious incorporation of the characteristics or virtues of the deceased (p.200).

Klass bases his ideas on a five-year study with a chapter of Compassionate Friends, a self-help group for bereaved parents, and grounds the experience of loss in both the inner and the social worlds of the bereaved. He discusses the grief process in a system developed by the subjects of his study. While this system seems to define stages of grief, Klass cautions that these phases may not apply to experiences other than those within the Compassionate Friends. The phases as labelled by his subjects are:

Newly Bereaved: Klass cites Kauffman (1994) in describing the initial response to death as dissociation rather than denial, and mourning as an interplay between integration and dissociation (p.201). According to Klass, there is a recognition that a part of the self has been cut off. He observes that connections with the deceased are often established through linking objects. Klass reports that parents experience a painful lack of social acceptance and understanding surrounding their feelings and behaviors:

> They find people will not mention the child's name in their presence, that inquiries about how they are doing imply that it doesn't hurt as bad as it does, that the child can be replaced by a new baby, or that God loves the child in heaven better than the parent could have loved the child here (p.202).

Into Their Grief: An inner representation of the deceased is established during this phase. Klass uses one man's auditory sensing experience to illustrate cases in which:

> . . . the inner representation of the child was integrated directly rather early in the grieving process in such a way that the child was maintained in the self system as before death. . . .
>
> About 6 months after the death, he was standing at the grave when he heard a voice, "Dad, why are you acting this way? This is what you were like when you were drinking". . . .Within a week Kim was his constant inner companion helping him control his rage and maintain his hard-won sobriety (p.204).

For many, ambivalence in attachment must be resolved and conflicting representations separated from each other (p.204-205). Separation of representations, he observed may involve idealization of the deceased. Separation of representations, he observed, may involve idealization of the deceased. Klass used the case of a woman as an example of this kind of idealization; however, this case also shows how sensing experiences may promote healing. This woman had repressed memories of her son's violence until she experienced his presence as coming to hurt her. Following these sensing experiences, she was able to place the bad part of her son in his grave. While personally this phase involves attachment to an inner representation, socially, this phase is a time of sharing the pain of loss. Klass recognizes, however, that outside the Compassionate Friends, family and friends need to be taught to listen and feel with the bereaved, rather than giving advice and telling the bereaved what to feel. Klass also observes that for most parents experiences of ongoing contact with their deceased are part of daily reality but "seeing, hearing and sensing the presence of dead children is not easily integrated into the social reality of most communities" (p. 206). He notes that early in the study attempts to share "experiences that fall outside socially sanctioned reality" were tentative (p.207). However, such experiences are now reported routinely (p.207).

Well Along in Their Grief: In this phase the bereaved let go of pain "in exchange for clearer, comforting inner representations of the child" (p.207). Identification is no longer with pain but with "the energy and love that was in the living child" (p.207). Social sharing of inner representations in a way that allows maintenance of the bond with the deceased often depends on membership in the group. For example, in honor of the continuation of bonds, members meet once a year and helium-filled balloons are released which contain messages parents most long to say to their children (p.209).

Resolved as Much as It Will Be: Resolution means that sadness is recognized but not feared; grief is never over but it does not stay the same. The bereaved move on with a life in which inner representations play a part in ongoing life. Resolution also often involves making the death count for something by making the experience of loss count for something. "One of the ways parents lives can count, and the child be real, is to help others (Klass, 1996, p.212). . . .The deceased are often incorporated into the "better selves in a way that makes the children seem like teachers of life's important lessons" (p.213).

These are the major theories of grief in which sensing experiences are given attention. If the field of psychology is represented by the theories which gain acceptance and recognition, it would seem that the collective viewpoint concerning sensing experiences has been that they deserve little mention. Where sensing experiences are given attention, they are considered in the context of attachment to, or detachment from, the deceased. Freud's (1917/1961) position reflects a stance requiring survivors to let go of the deceased and become free and uninhibited again. The sensing experience represents a withdrawal from the reality that the deceased no longer exists, and is viewed as evidence that the survivor is clinging on to the object, that is, the deceased loved one. From this perspective, there would seem to be no room for tolerance of the individual who might view the sensing experience as a spiritual experience. There would seem to be no room for tolerance of religio-cultural beliefs in an afterlife. Neither can the sensing experience be accepted as useful and healthy, an experience which may promote healing. Lindemann's view is also representative of a requirement to detach. Furthermore, the detachment should be achieved in four to six weeks, albeit with the help of psychiatrist. Those who have sensing experiences are seen as bordering on pathology. In the theories of Bowlby and Parkes detachment is still represented as synonymous with recovery. However, sensing experiences are now explainable. Although survivors are unlikely to admit it, they will, as animals do, search for the lost individual. And they will be angry at anyone who inhibits their search. Thus, the sensing experience can be seen as functional. By assisting the individual in maintaining a perceptual set for the one who is temporarily lost, there is increased likelihood of recovery. However, the experience is only temporarily functional, belonging in a stage or phase of grief preceding acceptance of the reality of death. Worden's theory does not represent any departure from this view of the function of the sensing experience. However, it does, in the fourth task of relocating the deceased and moving on with life, represent a shift toward a tolerance for continued connection with the deceased.

Klass (1996) appears to be developing the first theory of grief in which both sensing experiences and ongoing connection are recognized as functional and are given central focus in the theoretical framework. While continuing connection is expected rather than being merely tolerated, sensing experiences are defined as inner representations of the deceased person. Thus, religio-cultural views would be more easily accommodated in this context but they are not theoretically accepted as real. It appears, however, from Klass's descriptions that, in practice, within the Compassionate Friends group which he studied for five years, the bereaved at first shared their sensing experiences tentatively. Later, sharing was open and natural, and the interpretations which they assigned to their experiences were validated within the group. Thus, while in the theory, the sensing experience is presented as having intrapsychic reality, in practice, religio-cultural views about afterlife are accepted.

While Parkes (1972) and Bowlby (1980) provide a perspective by which to view the sensing experience as temporarily functional, Marwit and Klass (1996) show that sensing experiences are valuable in an ongoing way. They investigate the idea that recovery as detachment is grounded in theoretical models, rather than in the lives of survivors. They found evidence that inner representational figures function in four specific categories: role model, situation specific guidance, values clarification and remembrance formation.

Although, the idea of continuing connection seems to have received acceptance from a number of recognized grief experts (Klass & Silverman, 1996; Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe, 1996), this is still an area of contention. Rubin (1996) cautions that ongoing connection with the deceased may be adaptive or maladaptive:

> It is not whether there is an ongoing relationship to the deceased following loss that is of interest. To this author's way of thinking, that is a given. Rather, it is the nature and place of that relationship in the inner and outer worlds of the survivors that deserve our attention. . . .Relationship and attachment, of course, have extraordinarily basic functions in the maintenance of personality and functioning. It is only by accommodating figures, that we can speak of bereavement as a process with outcomes allowing for adjustment, adaptation, and resolution (p.230).

Horowitz: Sensing Experiences as Inrusions of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Horowitz (1993), another proponent of the idea that detachment requires resolution, regards sensing experiences as equivalent to the intrusions of post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD. He has suggested that either pathological grief be given a diagnostic nomenclature, or that the criteria of PTSD be modified to include pathological grief disorder. He observes, however, that a considerable portion of memories and images serve as "positive and temporarily comforting portrayals of the deceased as still alive" (p.270). It would seem he is reluctant in accepting that individuals must be allowed their religio-cultural views. He states that there must be functional impairment in addition to irrational beliefs or intrusive images because, "no established belief system, irrational as it appears, can be criterion of a disorder" (p.270). In identifying sensing experiences as problematic because of the torment for survivors of facing the reality of present emptiness in contrast to the comfort of sensing experiences, he ignores the possibility that survivors might willingly accept the former in order to receive the latter. He also equates sensing experiences with avoidant dwelling on the past which inhibits reorientation in life. This theory could explain why a preoccupation with images of the deceased was observed as a major component of grief in the Lindemann (1944) study. Findings which were based on a study of survivors of victims of fire in a night club in Boston. In this kind of grief context, trauma might be expected and intrusions therefore more likely.

Sensing Experiences

While the literature cited above focuses on theoretical explanations of grief and the place of sensing experience within those frameworks, the following is a review of the literature which focuses on the sensing experience itself.

Incidence in Bereavement

It is well-documented in the literature that sensing experiences are very common during bereavement. Rees (1971) surveyed the entire widowed population of a community in Wales, and found that 46.7% of 293 people he studied had such experiences. Experiences where subjects were not clearly awake were discounted. That is, experiences occurring in bed at night were discounted and recorded as dreams unless they occurred immediately on retiring. Experiences where the deceased was seen in the "mind's eye" were also discounted. A feeling of the presence of the dead was reported by 39.2% of his subjects; visual and auditory experiences were reported by 14% and 13.3% respectively; only 2.7% of the experiences were tactile. In Marris (1958), Parkes (1972), and Ball (1977) incidence of reports for widows was close to 50%. Although awakening reactions and experiences while dreaming or falling asleep were excluded, a notably high incidence of sensing experiences, 82%, was reported in Grimby's (1993) study of spousal bereavement in the elderly. This high incidence may be explainable on the basis of Grimby's observation:

> Despite great care being taken to create confidence in the interview situation, only one subject, a female spiritist, spontaneously reported hallucinations, referring to frequent "contacts with her dead husband". Only after being informed about the commonness and normality of post-bereavement hallucinations and illusions did most of the other widows and widowers speak freely, expressing relief from thoughts that they "might become or be considered insane". Two widowers dispatched the questions about hallucinations, labelling them ghostly disturbances (p.76).

This statement suggest two possible explanations for the data: that Grimby may have included seance experiences in his data, and that individuals may have reported experiences more freely once the risk of being labelled mentally unstable had been removed. If the latter explanation is accepted, it is possible sensing experiences are much more common than is evident in most research studies.

In the Rees (1971) study, incidence of reporting was very slightly higher for men than for women. In some studies, reporting was higher for women (Kalish & Reynolds, Grimby, 1993; Wiener et al, 1996). Two of fourteen men in Grimby's study "dispatched the question about hallucinations, labelling them ghostly disturbances" (p. 76); this may suggest that men are more likely to dismiss or underreport experiences than women. In light of gender differences in reporting, I found the response to requests to participate in my study interesting. All but one of the four women who were approached, agreed to volunteer. Of the six men who were approached, only two volunteered.

The findings of Yamomoto and colleagues (1969), who investigated sensing experiences in Japanese widows, are notable with 90% of their sample (N=20) reporting sensing experiences. The high incidence in this sample has been connected to the traditional practice of ancestor worship, which cultivates the idea that the deceased are present. One other factor may also contribute to these findings: the widows in this study were all bereaved through automobile accidents. Frequency of experiencing the presence of the dead has been related to violent death (Haraldsson, 1988) and to the unanticipated nature of the death (Glick, Weiss, & Parkes, 1974).

Incidence Cross-Culturally

In national survey data, the percentage of American adults reporting contact with the dead ranges from 36% to 42% (Fox, 1992; Greeley, 1987). Considerable variation by nation was found in a European Human Values Survey. The incidence of adults claiming to have felt contact with the dead was: Iceland, 41%; Italy, 33%; Great Britain and West Germany, 26%; France, 23%; Holland 11%; and Denmark and Norway, 9% (as cited in Haraldsson, 1985). Haraldsson (1988) did a follow-up study interviewing 127 of the original 181 respondents in the Iceland sample from the 1985 study. One hundred of these occurred in a waking state, nine had experienced the dead in dreams, six at a mediumistic seance, and the remainder were second-hand or unclassifiable. Only the experiences which occurred in a waking state were analyzed. Of these, 69 were definable as sensing experiences: the person perceived was a stranger in five cases, unidentified in 26 cases, a relative, friend, or coworker in 63 cases, and "others, identified" in the remaining six cases. Thus, in this sample 38% reported sensing experiences. Of these cases, five were defined as crisis-apparitions, that is, an apparition of the person was seen close to the time of the death without the experiencer being aware that the person was dead or about to die (p.111). McCready and Greeley (1976), who reported that 27% of their sample had been in touch with the dead, reported on human values in American society on the basis of survey results. This analysis was fascinating because experiences of contact with the dead and other mystical experiences were analyzed in conjunction with familial and religious factors. However, neither these researchers nor Fox (1992) differentiate between the kinds of experience of contact and, therefore, the pertinence to sensing experiences cannot be determined.

Relationship to the Deceased

Most of the studies on sensing experiences, reported in the literature, involve spousal bereavement, with incidence of report approaching 50% (Ball, 1977; Marris, 1958; Parkes, 1972; Rees, 1971). However, there is some evidence that they are also common in sibling and parental loss. In a study of adolescent grief reactions following sibling death (N=33), Balk (1983) found that about half of the teenagers reported perceptions of presence. Wiener and colleagues (1996) found that 47 out of 56 (83.9%) bereaved parents reported sensing experiences, 18 of the 56 (32.1%) while awake (Wiener, Aikin, Gibbons, & Hirschfeld, 1996). Greeley (1987) found that "people who'd lost a child or parent were less likely to report contact with the dead than those who'd lost siblings" (p.49). In his study of widows and widowers, Rees found increased incidence to be associated with happy marriage and parenthood.

Explanations of Sensing Experiences

Hallucinations

Sensing experiences have commonly been labelled as hallucinations or illusions. Thus, a discussion of this terminology is useful as a basis for discussions concerning this topic. The following definitions are taken from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (4th ed.,1994):

> [An *hallucination* is] a sensory perception that has the compelling sense of reality of a true perception but that occurs without external stimulation of the relevant sensory organ. Hallucinations should be distinguished from illusions, in which an actual external stimulus is misperceived or misinterpreted. . . .The term hallucination is not ordinarily applied to the false perceptions that occur during dreaming, while falling asleep (hypnagogic), or when awakening (hypnopompic). Transient hallucinatory experiences may occur in people without a mental disorder (p.767).

In the DSM-IV, it is stated that hallucinatory experiences may be considered a part of normal grief if they are fleeting (1994). However, "there may or may not be a delusional interpretation of the hallucinatory experience" (Kaplan, Sadock, & Grebb, 1994, p.306). That is, there may or may not be a "false belief, based on incorrect inference about external reality, not consistent with patient's intelligence and cultural background, that cannot be corrected by reasoning" (p.305). On the basis of this statement, it would seem that an individual who believed, on the basis of cultural background or religious beliefs, that the sensing experience was real, would not be labelled as delusional. However, Kaplan and colleagues also state that "in normal grief. . .the survivor realizes that the perception is not real" (p.81).

The stipulation of transience, mentioned above, may also be problematic in regards to the sensing experience. Rees (1971) found while experiences, which he observed to be compatible with favorable outcomes, were most common during the first ten years of widowhood, they often lasted many years. Zisook and Shuchter (1985) found that, although a preoccupation with thoughts of the deceased decreased over time, for 21 percent of the spouses in their study, persisted for four or more years. They concluded that in some ways, for many survivors, the deceased spouse stays with them indefinitely. In light of these findings, Rando's (1995) more flexible criteria for pathology seems more reasonable: "A response that is perfectly appropriate for one person in one set of circumstances may be pathological for another person in a different set of circumstances". She cautions, therefore, that "no interpretation of appropriateness or pathology can ever be made without careful consideration of these factors" (p.221) .

Because hallucinations have been associated with all types of psychotic illness (Waldinger, 1986), Moody (1988) explained the difference between mental illness and near-death experiences. This explanation may apply equally to sensing experiences:

> Many doctors and their support staffs know little about the NDE and how it differs from mental illness. . . .Unlike mental illness, an NDE is likely to lead to mental adjustment and well-being that will make the person better adjusted than they were before the experience. Mental illness, on the other hand, leads to unhappiness, despair, depression, and hopelessness (p.113).

Moody's differentiation between the schizophrenic episode and the NDE would also be likely to apply to sensing experiences. In the schizophrenic episode, a person is "likely to be tormented by voices and chaotic fragmented thoughts"; the effect is debilitating. The near-death experience is coherent and has a positive effect (p.114-115). From these statements, it could be concluded that where sensing experiences are coherent and lead to mental adjustment they should not be regarded as pathological whether or not they are viewed as real.

In some studies (Rees, 1971; Grimby, 1992) experiences of presence were not accepted if not occurring when subjects were clearly awake. This stipulation may be related to intentions of using results as evidence of survival, or simply a way to differentiate the experience from ordinary dreams and hallucinations. In this way, researchers avoid experiences related to hynagogic or hynpnopompic hallucinating. According to Akiskal (1994), hypnagogic and hypnopompic hallucinations are "visual experiences that occur in the twilight state between sleep and wakefulness, occurring respectively then falling asleep and waking up"(p.11). Such experiences are considered normal on occasion but when occurring repeatedly especially in association with sleep paralysis are "cardinal manifestations of narcolepsy, representing rapid eye movement intrusions into consciousness". In other words, in narcolepsy dreams continue into the waking state.

Haraldsson's (1988) findings may be related to hynagogic or hynnopompic hallucinating. He observed that his findings offered little support for the theory that experiences tend to occur when external stimulation is minimal, but some support for the theory that experiences tend to occur when in a resting or drowsy state. By self-report, one third were resting, sitting or lying in bed; a further third had just awakened or were on the point of going to sleep; and the final third were physically active, working or involved in daily activities (p.109).

Haraldsson (1988) also mentioned the theory that experiences tend to occur when external stimulation is minimal, however, he cited no source for this idea. Evidence linking hallucinations to sensory deprivation is available (Kaplan, Sadock, & Grebb, 1994, p.184). Sensory deprivation was a factor linked to the hallucinations experienced two miners who were trapped for six days (Comer, Madow, & Dixon, 1967). Siegel (1984) cites a number of studies where sensory deprivation precedes hallucinations and, in a phenomenological study of hostage hallucinations, identifies five antecedents conditions of hallucinatory experiences: (1) social isolation; (2) some visual deprivation; (3) partial restraint of physical movement; (4) physical abuse; and (5) threats to life.

Sensory deprivation is also a factor in the Charles Bonnet syndrome. This syndrome is described as involving visual hallucinations "of a pleasant or neutral nature in elderly persons 'without signs of a dementiform process' but with sensory deprivation such as ocular pathology" (Schneck, 1989, p. 409). Alroe and McIntyre (1983), posited a possible link between Charles Bonnet syndrome and grief. While in some instances descriptions are recognizable as sensing experiences, in many of these cases, there do not appear to be any people in the hallucinations (Domas-Mora, Skelton-Robinson, & Jenner, 1982; Gold & Rabins, 1989; Olbrich, Engelmeier, Pauleikhoff, & Waubke, 1987; Teunisse, Cruysberg, Hoefnagels, Verbeek, & Zitman, 1996; Teunisse, Zitman, & Raes, 1994). Thus, reports of sensing experiences seem to be undifferentiated from other experiences. In this context, Shneck (1989, 1990) would seem to have "discovered" sensing experiences. He observed that visual hallucinations could occur without sensory deprivation, and described the sensing experience of S. Weir Mitchell, distinguished neurologist and neuropsychiatrist, and another sensing experience. In each case he diagnosed the hallucinations as compensatory efforts to cope with the drastic sense of loss.

Sensing Experiences as Evidence of Survival after Death

There is a relatively large body of literature in which sensing and other experiences, such as out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences and death-bed visions, rather than being regarded as hallucinations, are regarded as evidence of survival after death. A review of this literature will be limited here to brief mention of some authors in this area. Early research in the late nineteenth century by the founders of the British Society for Psychical Research is remarkable in magnitude and rigor. As a result of the "census of hallucinations" (Sidgwick, 1894) seventeen thousand interview protocols were collected (Kastenbaum, 1979, p.165). One in ten reported experiences in response to the central question, "Have you ever, when believing yourself to be completely awake, had a vivid impression of seeing or being touched by a living being or inanimate object, or of hearing a voice; which impression, so far as you could discover, was not due to any external physical cause?" (Kastenbaum, 1979, p. 166). Research findings were discussed in Phantasms of the Living (Gurney, Podmore & Myers, 1886/1970). For a review of the historical research, in which sensing experiences were regarded as evidential of contact with the dead see Kastenbaum (1979). In this literature the deceased were labelled as ghosts, apparitions or spirits and the survivor as the percipient. LaGrande (1997) provides an up-to-date assessment of the sensing experience from this perspective. Another phenomenon described in this literature, that of the death-bed vision, is very similar to the sensing experience except that experiences of presence are reported to take place as the experiencer approaches death (Osis & Haraldsson, 1977). Callanan and Kelley (1992), who outline sensitive ways of being present with the dying, describe these experiences as part of Nearing Death Awareness. These experiences include visions of loved ones, spiritual beings, bright light, or another place, and feeling warm, peaceful, and loved. Most recently, sensing experiences are being viewed as part of a broad category of spiritual experiences. Harpur (1991) discusses research regarding near-death experiences, death-bed visions, sensing experiences, and reincarnation as experiences evidential of survival. Morse (1994) labels the phenomena as "death-related visions," including in this category experiences of post-death contact (sensing experiences), pre-cognitive experiences, dreams, near-death experiences, and death-bed visions. Kason (1994), who regards sensing experiences as psychic awakenings, defines the broad category of experiences as spiritual transformative experiences (STEs). Among the other experiences included are near-death experiences and mystical experiences. One interesting aspect of her discussion is a focus on the "spiritual emergencies" which may arise as part of spiritual transformation and lead to diagnoses of pathology. Sharp and Terbay (1997) have collected stories "of life and eternity" from those who were dying and from their survivors; they include reports of death-bed experiences and sensing experiences.

Crymptomnesia

There is an explanation of sensing experiences in which they are labelled neither as pathology nor as evidence of survival. They are seen instead as being produced in a similar way to dreams, as products of memory and creativity. Baker (1992) has suggested that hallucinations are experienced by normal people far more commonly than is realized. He cites Flournoy as the originator of the concept of cryptomnesia by which forgotten memories may be retrieved and elaborated (p.78). Baker asserts that the mind has a natural tendency to reconstruct, reorganize, and confabulate and he uses this idea to explain reported experiences of ghosts, dead people, spirits, fairies, demons, and extraterrestrial aliens, and sexual abuse (p.79). A similar explanation is offered by Gurney and Myers in 1889 to explain apparitional experiences:

> The reply of average common-sense to any account of an apparition is usually either that the witness is lying or grossly exaggerating, or that he was mad or drunk or emotionally excited at the time; or at the very most that his experience was an illusion—a misinterpretation of some sight or sound which was of an entirely objective kind. A very little careful study of the subject will, however, show that all these hypotheses must often be rejected; that the witness may be in good health, and in no exceptional state of nervousness or excitement, and that what he sees or hears may still be of purely subjective origin—the projection of his own brain. And among the objects thus fictitiously presented, it is only natural to expect that a certain percentage will take the form a human figure or voice which the percipient recognises as that of a deceased person; for the memory of such figures and voices is part of his mental store, and the latent images are ready to supply that material of waking hallucinations, just as they are ready to supply the material of dream (p.403-404).

Another author, whose work is pertinent in this area, Brent (1979), reports on a technique which is interesting in relation to sensing experiences. This is an exercise in projecting bodily awareness in an "act by which we take the images which are in our minds and put them out into the world and then act as though they existed out there independently. . ."

(p.95). Brent's (1979) focus is on illustrating the naturalness of experience and the capacity of human beings to "construct" experience.

All of the above explanations deserve attention for together they serve to illustrate that we are far from being able to reach firm conclusions about the exact cause and nature of the phenomenon of sensing experiences. In the following section, it becomes apparent that findings are also inconclusive regarding the impact of sensing experience on grief outcomes. Nevertheless, there is a basis for suggesting that the impact may, in at least some cases, be positive.

Sensing Experiences and Grief Outcomes

Different correlates have been associated with sensing experiences. A number of researchers (Grimby, 1992; Klass, 1995; Rees, 1971; Shuchter & Zisook, 1988) suggest that perceiving the presence of the deceased can bring great comfort. Conversely, widows who reported sensing experiences have been found to report worry, anxiety, and feelings of uselessness more often than non-sensing counterparts (Simon-Buller, Christopherson, & Jones,1988) and to experience more difficulty of adjustment (Christopherson & Jones, 1988, as cited in Simon-Buller et al, p.23). However, in Lindstrom's (1995) study, connections between difficulties with adjustment and sensing seem to hold only for extremely positive, or extremely negative experiences. "Neutral to slightly positive experiences" were associated with good adaptation and coping:

> During the interviews, many of these widows explicitly expressed that the sensing experiences had a comforting effect. Through the sensing experience they felt less alone, and imagined that they asked their dead spouse for advice in difficult decisions. The sensing experience thus reduced the feelings of emotional loneliness and lack of support in taxing situations. The sensing, therefore, was a way to master their situation. This seemed to be a part of their "emotional coping" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The strategy included positive emotional changes, and, therefore qualify as "active cognitive coping" in terms of Billings and Moos (1980, p.17).

It is clear from Lindstrom's description of the "neutral to slightly positive" category, how widows assigned to this category used the sensing experience adaptively to cope with loneliness and decision-making. However, there is no such descriptions given for the other two groups. Lindstrom states only that widows assigned to the "extremely negative experiences" group found the experiences disturbing and sought to avoid them, and widows in the "extremely positive experiences" group "found their loneliness extremely difficult to cope with, and expressed difficulties accepting the independence and the responsibility of living alone" (p.17).

The sensing experience has also been associated with severity of grief reaction (Lindemann, 1944; Vachon et al, 1982). Findings concerning nature of the death are mixed. Glick and associates (1974) reported that the single most important determinant related to the experiences was the unanticipated nature of the death (Glick et al, 1974). This finding was strongly supported by findings in the national survey in Iceland (Haraldsson, 1988). Where cause of death was known, 23 percent of deaths were violent, that is, by accident, suicide, or homicide, as compared to an 8 percent incidence of violent deaths in the general population. Other researchers (Rees, 1971; Simon-Buller et al, 1988) found no correlation between type of death and incidence of perceived presence.

In one study (Simon-Buller et al, 1988) a liberal religious orientation, as opposed to a conservative religious orientation, was reported as the most potent discriminator concerning sensing experiences (p.24).

Where factor analysis was performed on the dimensions of grief in spousal bereavement the following factors have been found to load together: calling the spouse's name, feeling drawn to places and things of the spouse, having sensing experiences, being preoccupied with thoughts of the spouse (Jacobs et al, 1987; Prigerson et al, 1996). This finding would seem to support Parkes' (1972) observation that, "'searching' and 'finding' go together" (p.59) and could be interpreted as evidence that perceptual set is functional is searching for a lost individual.. However, it could as easily be interpreted as evidence that the survivor need only be receptive to have an experience,

Creative Aspects of Various Experiences

Moody's (1993) observations regarding the hypnagogic state may be of interest in relation to sensing experiences because they provide evidence that although hallucinations are commonly associated with pathology, they may also have a creative aspect which could be highly useful to the experiencer:

> A high percentage of the normal population has experiences of vivid imagery at the point of sleep. Sometimes these take the form of colorful images, sometimes surrealistically distorted events.
>
> Hynagogic states have been used by some creative geniuses to solve problems. One who used this technique in his creative process was Thomas Edison, who would frequently catnap in his office when searching for solutions.
>
> One problem that he faced is that it is very easy to drift into full sleep from the hypnagogic state. Once asleep, one tends to forget the images experience. To overcome this problem, Edison dozed with a steel ball in each hand. On either side of his chair he placed metal dishpans. When he started to slip into unconsciousness, the balls would fall from his hands and clang against the pans. He would then awaken with memory of his hypnagogic experience still intact (p.16-17).

Therapeutic approaches which focus on creative aspects of "hallucinatory" experiences have been reported in the psychological literature. MacDonald and Oden

(1977) describe three cases in which Hawaiian teenaged students reported persistent visual sensing experiences which "served creative processes within the individuals". In Hawaiian culture, "aumakua" is the term for personal spirit, usually a departed relative with whom the person has had a special relationship. The students in these cases were told to face the visions and listen for messages. Outcomes were favorable; students responded to directives from the "aumakua", behavior difficulties subsided, and sensing experiences ceased.

Schatzman (1980) took a similar stance in working with Ruth who reported frequent and disturbing apparitional experiences of her father who had sexually abused her. While her experiences where similar to visual sensing experiences, her father was not deceased. She reportedly perceived him as wanting her to "do away" with herself (p.30). Schatzman did not view her as psychotic because she was "clear and logical in her thinking and lively in her speech, facial expressions and movements" (p.37). Furthermore, she did not feel that her life was barren or her future hopeless. She also had a rational understanding of her experiences and Schatzman understood hallucinatory experiences to be common in mentally healthy people. Basing his approach on that used by the Senoi tribe of Malaya in teaching children to master dreams, Schatzman reframed the hallucinations as reflecting creative ability rather than psychosis. In this way he was able to facilitate his patient's recovery as she successfully learned to confront and control the apparitions, and work through sexual abuse issues.

The perspective taken by Moody (1993), by MacDonald and Oden (1977), and by Schatzman (1980) in viewing the above experiences as useful and experiencers as creative, may also be a useful perspective to take concerning sensing experiences.

Theoretical positions have been presented which place the perceived presence of the deceased within the context of the grief process and findings from quantitative research. The incidence of such experiences in national surveys and in studies concerning specific populations has been identified. Different correlates associated with this phenomenon have also been considered. A number of explanations of sensing experiences have been presented, none of which provide conclusive evidence about the exact cause or nature of the phenomenon. Some creative aspects of similar experiences are described which may provide useful perspectives from which to approach counselling interventions. Researchers, it would seem, where they have demonstrated any interest in the sensing experience, have been intent on labelling it either as pathological or as evidence that the individual spirit survives after death. Scant attention has been paid to the meaning assigned to these experiences by the bereaved. In the following chapter, the means by which such individual experiences were investigated will be discussed.

Chapter Three

TOOLS FOR INQUIRY

Research Intentions: Hearing Silenced Voices

This study was undertaken in order to gain an understanding of the lived-experience of perceiving the presence of the deceased during grief. The authoritative voices of experts (including Freud, 1917/1961; Lindemann, 1944; Parkes, 1972; Rees, 1971; Worden, 1990) could be heard in reading from the psychological literature concerning sensing experiences. But, beyond brief descriptions, the voices of experience were silent. Little attention was paid to what these experiences meant to survivors. Little attempt was made to understand how those meanings influenced the grief process. I see this silencing of voice as being disrespectful to individuals. To be unwilling to listen to the specifics of experience in the research milieu, is be to be unprepared to listen in the therapeutic milieu. In approaching the research the question, "What is the lived-experience of perceiving the presence of the deceased during grief?" it was my intention to offer survivors the opportunity to reclaim voice. Therefore, my primary goal in this research was to give central focus to survivors' stories, to allow survivors to speak and to be heard. To realize this goal it was important that experiences be described coherently in a way that the vitality of original experience and original voices werere not lost. I believed that, in presenting findings, interpretation was inevitable: one aspect and not another would be included, one set of words and not another would be given emphasis. I wanted the act of interpretation to be explicit and intentional (van Manen, p.25). If I expected survivors to speak about a deeply personal and sensitive topic, I needed an approach that would allow me to establish a relationship in which sharing would be encouraged. My intentions were supported and enriched by aligning them with the hermeneutic phenomenological approach.

The Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenological Research

The aim of phenomenological research is to discover the essential attributes of a particular human experience and then to describe this experience clearly and accurately using "verbal portraits" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p.44-45). That is, original voices are retained and findings are given coherency. In phenomenological research individual experience is not lost to generalization (p.48). The goal in participant selection is aimed at obtaining richly varied description rather than achieving statistical generalization. For the phenomenologist, whether or not the phenomenon has objective reality is irrelevant; the focus of interest is on individual experience (p.49-50). This attitude is critical in choosing an approach because traditional methods, which would require an objective stance, were both incompatible with research aims and unsuited to a phenomenon unavailable to outside observation. The objective stance imposes on the researcher a need to maintain distance. The requirements of this research question are for intimate sharing. The phenomenologist's preferred method of data collection, the in-depth interview, allows the elicitation of feelings and emotions through open-ended questions. Phenomenology begins with what presents itself to consciousness, precisely as it presents itself to consciousness (Giorgi, 1994, p. 192). What is sought is lived-experience, that is, inquiry is grounded in direct contact with experience (van Manen, 1990). Attempts are made to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world as it is lived (van Manen, 1990, p.9). It is, in this case, as though a survivor re-lives the sensing experience and the grief process, and describes it as it unfolds. The return to original experience is important because with this topic, as with many others, it is easy to misinterpret:

> [It is easy to allow our] "common-sense" pre-understandings, our suppositions, assumptions, and the existing bodies of scientific knowledge, [to] predispose us to interpret the nature of the phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the question" (van Manen, 1990, p. 47).

To examine the lived experience of perceiving the presence of the deceased is to seek its fundamental nature (van Manen, p.53). Although pre-reflective experience is sought, meaning is important; the facts of a given experience are described in order to clarify their meaning (Giorgi, 1986, p.8). In phenomenological research the goal is to discover what a particular experience is like: "We gather other people's experiences because. . . they allow us to become "in-formed," shaped or enriched by this experience so as to be able to render the full significance of meaning (van Manen, p.62). To understand the meanings more fully is to be able to act more thoughtfully and more tactfully (van Manen, p.23), in this case as grief counsellors with clients who have had sensing experiences.

Hermeneutic Research

The hermeneutic aspect was included as part of the research approach because it allowed me to take a more active interpretive stance. It allowed me to dialogue more deeply with the experience. Hermeneutic understanding is arrived at through a circular, dialectical process: the parts are always interpreted in terms of the whole and the whole is understood by coming to understand constituent parts. Hollnagel (1978) explains the dialectic process in the following way. First, it is understood that there is no absolute beginning to the process; every understanding is based on some existent pre-understanding. Dialectic proceeds from an analysis of the whole into its parts, and then from a synthesis of parts into a whole (p.192). Initially a message may have several different interpretations or meanings. The researcher proceeds by making an assumption of what the meaning could be and then validating it in relation to the text. As the dialectic proceeds the number of possible meanings should be reduced until there is one possibility left (p.194):

> The purpose of the hermeneutical circle is thus to produce the best possible approximation to the intended meaning. . .the decision of this takes place by means of a validation with the original message in its original context (p.209-210).

The in-depth interview which allows access to experience also allows for reflection with the interviewee on the interpretation of that experience, to draw the participantexpert into the hermeneutic dialectical process (van Manen, p.63). Interpretation is important because through our culture we become oriented to phenomena in a way that renders the orientation invisible; the outside researcher may, therefore, more easily see patterns in experience that, because of our orientation, we do not readily see (McCutcheon (1981). According to Taylor (1971) hermeneutics represents "an attempt to elucidate, to make sense of. . . , to generate a clarifying interpretation when something is confused, incomplete, cloudy, seemingly contradictory; to make decisions under conditions of uncertainty" (Meichenbaum, 1988, p.123). "Events are interpreted in context" and meanings as experienced by individuals are emphasized (Messer, Sass & Woolfolk, p.xiv).

Packer (1985) illustrates the difference between rationalist or empiricist explanation and hermeneutic interpretation by likening the explanation to a map of a city and the interpretation to an account of the city by someone who lives in it and walks its streets (p.1091). The map, he explains, is the product of detached description, capturing only those features that would be unchanged if no one lived there. The account would likely be personal, incomplete, and prejudiced; however, it would allow its recipient to get to know the city better and to live it more fully. The city "is a system of possibilities and resources, frustrations and obstacles, and two people will find both commonalities and differences in their accounts of it" (Packer, 1985, p.1092). To undertake to convey such rich complexity as human experience in context is daunting. However, the recognition of and admission that the account will be personal, incomplete and prejudiced, is freeing, and the possibility that the reader will get to know the experience fully, as it has been lived, is appealing. To be aligned with the hermeneutic approach is to be given permission to interact personally with experience, to embrace its complexity, to dialogue with it intensely, and to experience it deeply.

> To undertake "hermeneutic phenomenology is to attempt to accomplish the impossible: to construct a full interpretive description of some aspect of the lifeworld, and yet to remain aware that lived life is always more complex than any explication of meaning can reveal" (van Manen, p.18).

Bracketing

In using the hermeneutic phenomenology approach, researchers adhere to the view that all research is influenced by the presuppositions and assumptions of the researcher. Bracketing is the process by which the presuppositions and expectations of the researcher are articulated in order to minimize their influence on the research and assist the reader in assessing the validity of conclusions. As part of this process, Colaizzi (1978) suggests the following questions be addressed: How do I come to be involved with this particular phenomenon? Why did I choose the phenomenon I chose to study? What are my personal inclinations and predispositions as to research? How might these influence or even bias how and what I investigate?

Initial Involvement with Sensing Experiences

I first encountered this phenomenon when Mike, a man I knew well, had a visual sensing experience in the context of my own personal loss. I found Mike's experience particularly fascinating for two reasons. First, he is a concrete thinker who, prior to having his own experience, would have given little credibility to anyone else who reported such an experience. Second, his bond to the deceased was not a central one. Thus, his experience did not seem explainable as a stress reaction except insofar as the death was a suicide and the deceased was only twenty-five years old (i.e. the death was sudden, unexpected, untimely, and seemed avoidable). Although I had never heard of sensing experiences before, I was able to locate a body of literature concerning them and was surprised by the high incidence of such experiences in grieving. Mike seemed to find his experience to be profound, transformative, and ineffable. It seemed apparent from my readings that at least some others had also found their sensing experiences to be meaningful. From findings reported in the psychological literature it seemed plausible to estimate that in almost half of significant losses (Ball, 1977; Balk, 1983; Marris, 1958; Parkes, 1972; Rees, 1971; Wiener et al, 1996), survivors might experience this phenomenon. If anywhere close to this number are having these experiences I believed it important to seek an understanding of what sensing experiences mean to those who experience them.

Personal Inclinations and Predispositions

Following my reception of this first story about perceiving the presence of the deceased I became fascinated by the topic. I believe that, in reality, part of my motivation was that I wanted to find evidence that the one I had lost might, in some way, have survived. This motivation was perhaps related to acute grief. The focus of motivation soon changed, not because I no longer wanted evidence, but because I did not believe there could ever be enough evidence to constitute proof. Therefore, I shifted my focus. I was deeply interested in the therapeutic utilization of image as part of guided imagery techniques and as part of exploring dream images. I had seen beneficial results from using such techniques, and I believed that images generated by individuals could be very useful in therapeutic processes. Having found evidence that sensing experiences are very common during grief, I wanted to explore the possibility that they could be as a focus of healing. I had preliminary evidence that sensing experiences have the potential to be beneficial or problematic. Although, at first I had dismissed the incident so thoroughly I had forgotten about it, a second acquaintance had, years earlier, told me about his sensing experience to which he reacted negatively. I did not know if later reactions were problematic, benign or beneficial. In any case, on the basis of my readings, and Mike's more accessible experience, my tendency was to expect beneficial rather than problematic reactions to having had a sensing experience. I also believed it likely that providing information about current understandings of the phenomenon would benefit those who have had such experiences. Consequently, I felt research could be important, and that there were possibilities that clients might benefit from discussing their experiences.

In regard to beliefs individuals express about their sensing experiences, I believe it important to respect the individual's right to take their own stance on a question that is not, so far, answerable by scientific inquiry, but falls instead in the arena of philosophical belief. I further believe that in seeking to understand the experience through qualitative and clinical research I am preparing myself and my readers to hear and respond to survivors' stories in therapeutic situations.

Sources of Bias

Through examining my presuppositions and understandings, I became more aware that I might place undue importance on an element of grief that the bereaved may regard as trivial. I might expect and see more importance attached to sensing experiences than was justified, and I might also expect and elicit more positive aspects of these experiences than was justified. As a result, the manner in which I posed my questions might influence subjects to answer in ways that distort their actual experiences and deny the negative aspects. However, as a result of examining my own views I felt I was in a better position to avoid these tendencies.

Participants

Data was gathered through interviews with individuals, 18 years of age and older, who had had a sensing experience during grief. The criteria for selection was primarily convenience. Participants were referred to me by a professional colleague or volunteered because they knew about my research through friends. I had spoken to many of my friends about my research intentions and, to my surprise, they often knew of someone who had had a sensing experience, and would volunteer to ask them if they were interested in participating in my study. I knew Mike well before the study; I was friend's with Luke's wife, and was acquainted with Luke; the other participants I had never met before this research project was undertaken. My intention was to use only those interviews from individuals who were able to articulate their experiences clearly and articulately and who represented cases rich in data. However, each participant's story seemed important to share and I did not seek further than the first seven I interviewed. Even where experience was fleeting and reactions straightforward, contributions seemed important.

There were five women and two men who participated in the research, including Mike, who initially introduced me to this phenomenon. Losses through bereavement were from seven months to approximately twenty years ago. All participants seemed eager to talk about their experiences. Although four of the participants were of aboriginal race, only one adhered to traditional beliefs. This participant reported that her experiences were not regarded as unusual in the native culture, however, elders viewed the experiences as evidence that the bereaved was not letting go of the deceased.

Interviews

Before research was begun with other participants, I conducted a pilot study with Mike, my initial informant. Preliminary interviews with Mike were short and frequent. I would initiate another conversation whenever a question occurred to me. The interviews with Mike were not audio-recorded but they were recorded in writing and all transcripts were read to this participant and verified as accurate. This pilot study enabled me to develop a sense of what questions were important to address, and it was on the basis of these insights that an interview guide was developed.

I met with each of the other participants for 2 interviews of approximately an hour to one and a half hours each. An interview protocol (Appendix B) was used for the first interview as a guide only. In most cases, my participants needed little prompting to tell their stories. All interviews were transcribed personally and broken down into meaning units, coded and themes identified. In this way essential elements of experience were allowed to emerge. During the second interview, themes were discussed with my participants. From that discussion new insights emerged and were used to refine themes and elucidate meanings. A structure of experience grew out of the engagement with individual stories. In part, the structure emerged through the coding process, in part it emerged through the ongoing dialectic process of alternately considering whole and parts. There was a deep conviction that the themes and structure emerged from the data rather than being imposed upon it. However, between the first and second set of interviews, I wrote out my own grief story and attended to my own motivations as I wrote. Why was this important to say? What was it that prompted me to include this? What was behind the expression of that? Through this process, I believe I gained useful insights which were validated or dismissed during the second set of interviews.

Ethical Considerations

Where the initial contact was not by telephone or in person, participants were given a written description of the nature and purpose of the research (see Appendix A). Where initial contact was by telephone, a similar verbal description was given. The nature and purpose of the research was also discussed at the first interview.

Informed consent forms (Appendix C) were given to participants at the outset of the first interviews; each participant read the form and verbal explanations were also given at that time.

Participants were advised of their rights, and the investigator's right, to opt out at any time without penalties. In addition, they were informed that if they did not wish to answer specific questions they should indicate this and we would proceed to the next question.

Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained during and after the study. Before audio-taping began at the first interview, participants chose pseudonyms to protect their identity. All identifiers were omitted from audio-tapes, transcripts, and reports. Participants were advised of risks to anonymity, that is that they might be recognizable from their stories. Names and addresses and audio-recordings will be kept for future research or publications only with the express consent of participants. All other audio-recordings will be destroyed when the research is complete.

Because interviews about the death of loved ones in some cases could resurrect issues of grief related to the loss, participants were advised of this possibility during the first interview. Where participants were not already in therapy, referrals were offered in anticipation of such an eventuality at the first interview.

Limitations of the Study

Because this research was guided by hermeneutic phenomenological traditions, the goal in choosing participants was to obtain people who were articulate and who had varied experiences. No effort was made to obtain a representative sample on dimensions that might be of interest, including age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, education, modality of experience, relationship to the deceased, or character of the death. This method allows the researcher to access depth of experience, to capture variations in experience, and to gather information about the context. However, because of the large amount of data that is generated, the number of participants must be strictly limited. For these reasons the extent to which the findings of this study may be generalized to other populations are left to the reader.

Because the data is gathered through personal interviews, there are limitations to the validity. It is possible that participants might have fabricated or altered experiences or dimensions of experiences; distortions in memory are also possible. Furthermore, although survivors may believe experiences are helpful, they may be detrimental to functioning in ways of which the survivors are not aware. For the purposes of the present research, accepting this limitation is preferable to limiting study to areas available to outside observation; the focus of interest is on the personal meanings.

A further limitation of this study is that the interpretation of the data presented here is only one interpretation. Essential features of the grief process and of sensing experiences, identified in this study, will not necessarily align with essential components of experience in other contexts or as identified by other researchers. The extent to which common themes revealed here are relevant in other situations will be determined by readers as they compare the findings of the present study to the experiences and research of others.

Overview of Thesis and Introduction to Participants

In the next three chapters, understandings which emerged from this research study are presented. The analysis presented here represents one interpretation of the data which was gathered in conversations with participants. Repetitions will occur as themes emerge;

the hermeneutic process of circling from parts to whole to parts again, unfolds as we spiral through stories. As themes emerge it will become clear that their configuration is not linear. Neither are themes discrete. Rather, they are interwoven in complex patterns that are different for each bereavement. It is also for this reason that quotations will be repeated; they illuminate more than one theme. The following chapters concern the emerging themes: Chapter Four: Meaning of Death in Life and Relationship; Chapter Five: The Grief Experience; Chapter Six: Woundedness; Chapter Seven: Perceiving the Presence of the Deceased; Chapter Eight: Sensing Experiences as Part of the Grief Process; and finally Chapter Nine: Discussion.

Before going on to Chapter Four, and the presentation of emergent themes, in order ensure that descriptions provided by participants are meaningful, I will introduce the participants, by their pseudonyms, in the order in which they were first interviewed. Other details about the participants will be revealed as findings are presented; however, those given below will serve to provide coherency to initial descriptions. Unimportant details have been changed in order to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

Mike

Mike, a sturdy athletic man in his late forties, was a contractor who seemed very sure of himself and, as a consequence, very sure of his experience. Perhaps because I knew him well, he was openly emotional about his experience. I have experienced him to be someone who is concrete in his thinking. He expressed his views decisively. He relationship with the deceased, as he described it was one of potential friendship. They had in common a love of nature and an enjoyment of physical work. Interviews began immediately after his experience, and continued until the current research was complete. Mike was raised as a Christian but, until he had his sensing experience, was unsure about his belief that there was something after death.

Indrea

By the end of the first interview with Indrea, who was in her early sixties, I thought of her as a philosopher. She reported that she had searched for years for the meaning of life, studying the Bible for six years then, unsatisfied, turned to Eastern philosophy. She also reported that she believed in reincarnation. Indrea was remarkable for the intensity with which she spoke and the certainty of her opinions. She needed little prompting, but spoke freely and at length about her experiences, her feelings, and her beliefs. She had lost her father four years before, but her grief seemed fresh and she was occasionally tearful. Indrea identified positive qualities in her father and in their relationship, but these appeared in fragments throughout the interview and, because of this and the faintness of praise, seemed to have been gleaned through search and struggle.

Georgina

Georgina, who was her late thirties, was attractive and soft-spoken, but articulate and thoughtful in her answers. Although she was friendly, she seemed somewhat reserved. She was well-groomed and, from her manner, gave the impression of being very self-possessed and poised. She was employed as a social worker. Georgina's father had died seven months prior to the first interview; but, while there was evidence of continuing grief, she did not display her emotions openly. Given an opportunity to speak about her father and their relationship, Georgina did not have to search or struggle. Her answers had depth and were direct and to the point. Georgina expressed a belief in God where relationship, not religious affiliation, was the important thing.

Julia

Julia, a pretty and appealing young woman in her mid-twenties, gave the impression of softness. She had a gentle manner, very soft speech, and an open vulnerability. Julia's speech was characterized by hesitations; she often seemed unsure of her ability to express herself. Nevertheless, she seemed very sure about her belief in her experiences, and described her thoughts and feelings very clearly. She had lost her father seven months before the first interview, and was openly emotional about her loss. Julia was employed as a nursing assistant. She expressed a firm belief in God and, after death, in an ongoing life with God.

Jane

Jane, a woman in her late forties, seemed somewhat dispirited or tired at the outset of the interview, but appeared to gain energy and enthusiasm as she spoke about her experience. We were not far into the interview when she seemed friendly and cheerful. She had lost her grandmother approximately twenty years before, but was unhesitating in describing her experience. Jane's pride was evident when she spoke of her closeness with her grandmother, who had visited often when she was young and had taught her how to bake. Jane gave the impression of being self-assured, forthright about her beliefs, and unconcerned about whether or not others agreed. Although Jane had epilepsy and multiple sclerosis, she was included in the study because my research intentions were not focussed on objective reality, but rather on personal meanings of experience. There was no evidence of cognitive impairment, she was lively and articulate in her speech, and obviously found her experience meaningful. Jane claimed to have no interest in church but believed firmly in a life beyond this one.

Luke

Luke, who was employed in the area of public relations, was a very attractive man in his early forties with a ready smile and a friendly manner. He seemed self-assured, gentle in manner, and quietly confident in speech. His words flowed easily and he expressed himself clearly and with depth. He needed little prompting to share his thoughts and his feelings about his experience. Luke had lost his brother, Matt, without warning, almost exactly one year prior to the first interview. Because Matt was big and fit, the loss seemed inexplicable to Luke, and he did not hesitate to disclose that, for him, the grief process was not over. Luke claimed to have no firm beliefs concerning life and death; he alternated between believing in reincarnation, and believing that death was a final ending.

Celeste

Celeste, an entrepreneur, had a manner which was immediately friendly and open. She seemed assured but unpretentious. She spoke freely and quickly, describing her thoughts and feelings in depth with a rush of words. Few questions were needed to elicit her experiences and she volunteered a great deal with no prompting. She had a warm laugh which emerged easily. Celeste expressed a firm belief in the Creator which developed as she dealt with her grief after her mother died, approximately twenty years ago.

Chapter Four

MEANING OF DEATH IN LIFE AND RELATIONSHIP

> "O this particular loss is Heaven mourned. . .
> [For] every life is noted and is cherished,
> And nothing loved is ever lost or perished."
> Madeleine L'Engle
> (1980, p.166)

The meaning of death is found in the meaning of the life of the deceased, and of the relationship lost. Death happens in the lives of particular people, to the deceased and to the survivor. Thus, stories of grief are stories rooted in individuality, individual lives and individual relationships. They begin with, "He was my brother", "she was my Gran," "he was my Dad", or "he was my friend". This is who the deceased was, and this is who we were together. It is in the richness of life lived and the quality of connection that survivors gather strength. Or, it is the barrenness of life lived and the lack of connection which makes so difficult for survivors the task of finding meaning in the life and achieving acceptance and peace with the reality of the death. These survivors related incidents where there was betrayal, abuse, rebellion, anger, and even hatred. But there was always a relationship, some connection, and for most, there was love. And, as one of my participants decided, perhaps when there was hate, it was only a mask for hurt, and there may still have been love.

Grief is about stories. As a survivor tells the story of one who is gone, they are making meaning of a life. And to make meaning of a life is a way to make meaning of a death: grief processes are inseparable from stories. To look first at the specific deceased and the specific relationships is to take a beginning step in understanding the individual process of grief. Thus, the stories of specific individuals are presented here in some detail because they emerged from the data as central to all other themes. Stories of grief are complex stories of life, relationship, loss and pain. They can also be stories of transformation and hope.

These stories are also important because context gives coherency to later discussion. Elements from these stories will appear again. The hermeneutic process unfolds and themes emerge as we circling from parts to whole to parts again. Themes are not discrete but interwoven in patterns that are as complex and as unique as the individual deceased and the individual relationship.

Specialness of Deceased Individual

Independently of the relationship with the loved one, it seemed important to survivors that they articulate the individual's identity, that they give testament to the uniqueness of that individual. Although speaking of the deceased occasionally brought tears, the healing power inherent in the act of storying was apparent from the animation and enthusiasm with which survivors spoke. It is understandable that these survivors took great care to portray the deceased accurately and to ensure their descriptions were clear. Each survivor was making meaning of a life. It dawned on me as it dawned on Mary Jones at the completion of her book, Secret Flowers: Mourning and Adaptation To Loss, that stories of grief are love stories. Thus, the stories which follow are love stories, or, at the least, stories of caring.

Luke's Brother: Vitality/Capacity for Living

Luke portrayed his brother, Matt, as a man impressive for his size and strength. Matt was irresponsible but *you still had to love the guy* and he loved back. His irresponsibility was balanced by his easy-going attitude and his love of people, all kinds of people. This portrait was of a man who possessed an appetite for living. A very physical, very jovial man with a deep booming laugh. This ability to live made death more sad, but the story also implies that life had meaning.

Matt was my younger brother. He was a big man. He liked to keep fit and he did very physical work. . . .He was always carrying heavy stuff around, and he worked out a lot. He liked to play racquetball and other sports, I mean he was really into that, and he worked out at the gym quite a bit.

He was kind of a jovial sort. It was one of the things that we really had in common, and you don't see that, or I don't see that in a lot of other people. . . They fret too much and worry about this and that. I admired his, "Oh, well, attitude." The jovial part and the, "Oh, well," attitude, because too many people get caught up in where small things are so important to them. And then some of the things weren't so small, but his way of thinking was, "Oh, well, that's just the way it goes."

He was irresponsible. In fact, if you look up irresponsible in the dictionary there's a picture of him [laughter]. Seriously. He just didn't give two hoots about a lot of things, but it was in a good way. You know, it was like, "Oh, I forgot this," you know, and he was serious, I mean it was genuine. He just forgot, or he just couldn't manage himself for the next couple of weeks, you know. He just couldn't do it.

He liked to drink. He drank a fair amount. He and my other brother, Mark, had a pub, and Matt would go around and visit everybody in the bar. It didn't matter who they were, young, old, the suits, the blue collar people. It didn't matter. He'd sit down. He was funny; he could laugh at anything. He had a very deep, almost a roar for a laugh, so when he laughed everybody knew he laughed. And he could just get everybody going, that's the way he looked at his job, [it] was to get everybody in a good mood. If something was bothering him you'd never know it. He wasn't that type of a guy. He was very upbeat. Matt got along great with everybody, that's just the type of guy he was.

Will: Mike's Friend: Potentiality

Matt's strength and vitality attested to a potential for life. Potentiality was also demonstrated by Will. As with other survivors, Mike's perception of the deceased was important to his grief process. Who was Will? It was apparent that Mike's story was not only a description of his friend but is also about meanings Mike had assigned. This was a story about potentiality, misdirected at times, but potentiality nonetheless.

Will was a person who I figured was very mixed up and needed help. He was a likable person. I thought he was a little more down to earth than most young people are. He liked nature.

If you saw him, he was so happy-go-lucky. I never noticed him in his down moods. Around me he was never like that. Once in awhile he'd pull these real dumb boner things and do some stupid thing to screw up his life some more. Here was a young healthy person who could have had a good life if he only could have got straightened around. He probably would have been better off if he'd been born 100 years earlier, where the wildness was allowed. He'd have had a much better chance. He could have been out punching cattle or a trapper back in the hills going wherever his horse would lead him. . . .But he'd have probably wound up in Jesse James' gang or, you never know, he might have been an Indian fighter or something.

It still could have gone either way. But it was acceptable to get in bar fights, and go out and get drunk. When he went out and got drunk he got thrown in jail and his car confiscated. It wouldn't have happened 100 years ago; they wouldn't have taken his horse. They let them out of jail again next day, no problem. If he'd been born back when the west was being explored, when it was rough and tough, when that was the way you survived, he would have fit. He would have been good at what everybody was doing. The world we have now, rough and tough didn't fit. I think he wanted to fit in. He just didn't seem to be able to control what he did.

Georgina's Father: A Life Fully Lived

Whereas Will's story was one of a potentiality which might have lead to a long rich life, for Georgina's father the life was long and rich. As with other participants, Georgina's grief process was inseparable from her story of her father's life. This was a story of potential realized, and of a life fully lived.

There were never any negative moments. No matter how much he suffered there was always something to be positive about. He had really bad days where we thought he wasn't going to be able to make it and in the end he always smiled. There was no such thing as a bad day. If it was a bad day he was really quiet and withdrawn. But he still continued with the hugs.

I feel my Dad had a purpose in life and that was to plant the goodness in his children's hearts, and to teach them the right way of life. And growing up as children we saw him, a really warm loving compassionate person. He told his kids everyday how much he loved them.

He believed in God. Not so much, "This is the church you go to; this is the church you have to attend to be saved," it wasn't like that. It was more a relationship with God and that relationship is ultimate. No church is going to get you into heaven. It's the relationship with God that's going to get you there. That was his belief, and *mine. For 25 years, he preached the gospel for people who wanted to hear; he never shoved it down anybody's throat. He was a servant of the Lord for 25 years.*

He touched a lot of people. At the funeral, people we didn't even know came up to us and shook our hands and said, "I knew your Dad." There were people we didn't even know who came in to the funeral from Saskatchewan. And the son-in-laws and the daughter-in-laws were as devastated as we were. It was almost like it was their own parent. One of my sisters-in-law said to me, "You know, I feel so lost without your Dad. Because he made up the 'I love you's' that I never get from my Dad.

Julia's Father: A Man of Power

Julia is Georgina's sister; however, their experiences of their father were not the same. Julia is the youngest of 9 children, Georgina the second oldest. Georgina looked up to her father but Julia had elevated him to a higher position of power and was less able to accept that he never took his children away from an abusive mother.

He was a really religious man. He was a preacher-man. He worked for the Lord and he worked for all of this kids. I had the opportunity to be with him when he was out preaching. He travelled in northern Alberta, in Saskatchewan, all over. I saw him do what he did. People had such a strong belief in my father that it was overwhelming. I couldn't believe that people really loved this man who happened to be my father. A whole bunch of people would come out just to listen to him. It really meant something to me that all these people came to listen to my father. All kinds of people were there and not one did he treat differently.

He had a whole list of stories about healing people. When people walk into church using crutches and then they walk without crutches. I've seen my Dad do that. When I see it on TV I don't believe it's real. But when you're actually there, you can feel the power of the presence of God when that happens. It does happen; it did happen. I've seen it happen. I suppose knowing that he can bring all the power to heal a person is what helps me.

He was such a man of God I think he is God, I guess.

Just as meanings of individual identity were important to the grief process, so too, were meanings of relationship between survivor and deceased. For many, grief was rooted in specialness of connection and caring.

Specialness of Connection and Caring

Relationships were special, unique and irreplaceable for survivors in this study. Others could show caring and support, but no one else, no matter how beloved or how special, could fill the space left by the one who had died. Celeste recalled that she was a middle child and a favorite child. Jane, too, was a favorite with her "Gran". Jane's Gran taught her to bake, a skill that promoted her sense of competency. Jane spoke with pride of her first Home Economics class in school when the assignment was to plan a menu for a meal. Jane was able to write the plan for a meal instantly because she had cooked one the

Sunday before. Jane's pride was also evident when she spoke of her closeness with her grandmother, a closeness that Jane tried her best to maintain even after she moved away from home.

> *My father would pick her up every 2nd weekend and bring her to stay for the weekend. And she and I would sit and bake and sew and bake [laughter], all those sorts of things. So I guess I was basically the closest of her grandchildren. That's the only reason I could think of that she came to say goodbye. Also because I was named after her daughter who died. My mother is a twin. And my mother's twin passed away at 4 months of age. And I was named after her.*
>
> *I'd go and visit her as often as I got the chance. I was living in northern B. C. at the time, and Gran was in Edmonton, so it was quite a distance.*

Jane spoke of a special closeness with her "Gran"; the bond between Luke and his brother was also special and enduring.

> *From a brotherly standpoint, there was a certain bond that we had. Even through all of our trials and tribulations, and, believe me, there were lots of them, there was still that bond there, no matter what. No matter how badly he screwed up, or I screwed up, it was, "Oh, well, that happens," then carry on. It wasn't something that we dwelt on.*

For Georgina the specialness of relationship with her father began when she was born and continues after death:

> *I was really very close [to my father]. Very close, very close. He was my pillar, my everything.*
>
> *When I was born my Dad told my Mom, "This is the little girl that I've been praying for. This is my little angel that I prayed for. It was a special connection right from the beginning but he never showed that he treated anybody differently. The specialness I had with my Dad began when I was just a little kid, began when I was born. And that hasn't been altered at all. It's still strong. It's just the physical part of it has been taken away.*

Julia's father demonstrated a special caring through the gentleness of his guidance.

> *He was so understanding. There was nothing his kids did wrong. Although he knew we were wrong he didn't tell you that. He didn't tell you, you were wrong but he made you see that there's another way of doing things, a better way.*

Deceased Needed and Reliably There

Relationships were important to survivors because the deceased had been reliably there for them. Their love was dependable. For Julia this was part of the specialness of the relationship she had with her father:

He was my Dad and my relationship with him was special. My Dad was always there for me. Although I had a lot of angry feelings toward him because of reasons that have passed, he was always there for me. I had a really special relationship with my Dad. All of us kids did.

He would help me see that you can't run away from life. You have to deal with things. That's why I always went to him was because of that. He didn't make mountains out of molehills. He took things in stride. Whatever comes your way, deal with it. I knew what was right, it just took me a long time to do it, to get it right. He just talked, "You know what you have to do and whatever you decide is what will happen." That's why I used to go see him. There's a lot of things that come your way you don't know how to deal with. I knew I could do it but I needed that strength from him first.

Just as Julia turned to her father, Celeste, turned to her mother whenever anything went wrong:

Now I can say my mother was a good mother. She did the best she could for us with what she had. And when I learned to let her go that's what I started realizing. She was a good person. She was always good to me. To me meaningful is that she was a good mother. There was a lot of things happened but she was a good mother, the best she knew how. We never had anything, really, as we grew up but we had her and we were very close. My brothers and sisters and her. Before her death, when anything happened, I'd go run to Mom. She'll fix it anyway, no matter what happened. Except for the sexual abuse because I didn't think then, I guess, it was anything. But everything else I'd go home and, any little thing, I'd have a fight with somebody or I didn't like school or something, she was always there to fix it.

When Luke described Matt's "being there" he portrayed a scenario in which he was welcomed home or sent off again in a way that demonstrated love. No one else performed this function, only Matt was there. Matt was also reliable as a defender.

Matt was always there. I never stayed at home. Ever since I was 16, I was living somewhere else. Whenever I flew home or drove home he was always the first one there. If I flew in he was always at the airport to pick me up, or, if I was going somewhere he always came to the airport to see that I got away, and, you know, do those things everybody hates at the airport. Like, I'd say, "Just drop me off and go," you know. But he had to come in and wave goodbye. And then he'd pick me up and we'd sit in the lounge for two or three hours. And he was one of the few people who actually made the effort to do that. Everyone else wants to pick you up and go, sort of thing. Which is okay, too, but to him, he made a point that he just didn't pick you up and away he went. You know, everything was a celebration in its own way, no matter how big or how small, that's the way he lived.

That's one thing Matt was good at. No one, no one, ever made any derogatory remarks about a family member. He was a big man. He'd just thump you one. And he'd [laughs] laugh at you. That's the way he was. He was a really good person in that sense.

The reliability of her father's love was also important to Georgina. As an example of what their relationship was like Georgina spoke of his support after her divorce. While her mother and the rest of her family criticized her for leaving her husband, her father supported her in a way that was typical in their relationship:

> *He said, "I've been seeing you ever since you left your husband." He said, "I've been watching you and I see how much you're struggling. I had a dream about you and the marriage you were in was not safe. I don't want you to worry what everybody else thinks because it's you that has to be happy. And if you're happy then I'm happy. It was almost like nothing else mattered after that. He brought me back up and I started to go back to school. That's the way he was even when he was really suffering.*
>
> *I could have a really hard day, a really stressed out day, and even though he was sick I could go sit at and the hospital with him and feel the peace that he had.*
>
> *My Dad did a lot of wrong, but, for me, everything he did with me was right. My Dad told me there was lots he would never brag about, that he did wrong. But he did his best.*
>
> *I don't think it was things he did. I think it was the love that he had that he shared, the love he showed to all of us: lots of hugs, lots of kisses, lots of everything, telling, "I love you's," and, "You're doing a good job, I'm proud of you."*

The importance of this man's role in Georgina's life is demonstrated by the consequences of his loss:

> *My Dad was the one who kept the family together, kept the kids together, kept the mother and the kids together. And the love he had. . . spread out throughout the whole family and brought us together. But after he died everybody kind of dispersed and started going on with their own life in their own way, and grieving in their own way. [We became] very separate.*

Being Needed

In the above cases, the deceased were needed and reliably there. In the following case, Mike views the need as being reversed. Mike saw potential in Will, was aware of his difficulties, and wanted to help him. Furthermore, Mike recognized a potential for friendship. Will was likable and would have enjoyed working with Mike, fishing with him, or farming with him. There was potential for relationship and some relationship was established but most did not come to fruition.

> *Will was a likable person. I liked him. We had a lot in common. We had the same feelings about nature. We loved the outdoors, we felt at home there. He was a young friend. Well, I don't know if he was a friend or not. I was busy; I was gone all the time, working out of town. And when I came into town I was busy: cutting grass, doing the garden, fixing things that were broken. I never had time for anything else.*
>
> *I just wish that I could have been somebody that helped him. I think maybe I did help him in a way. I wouldn't strike him when he thought he should be struck. I didn't*

yell at him, I talked to him like another human being. When he did something stupid I explained to him, next time why doesn't he come to me before he does something like that.

I believed that, in hindsight, I could have made things a little easier for him, making sure he got a job. . . .I don't know, there's endless things you could probably do. Take him fishing. Take him to the farm. It may not have helped but it could have made a difference.

In this chapter, a view of grief is presented in which stories are central to healing. Stories are the vehicle by which meanings are assigned by survivors to the lives of the individuals they have lost. It was apparent from themes which emerged as components of these stories that it was important for survivors to identify the special qualities of the individuals who had died. Meaning was also realized in relationship: in specialness of connection and caring, in needs met by the deceased, and in the reliability of their love. Being needed was also meaningful.

It would seem that negative aspects of the deceased and of relationship have been ignored. It would seem, too, that the stories of some participants are absent. These negative aspects, and these stories, will be presented in the next two chapters on the grief process.

Chapter Five

THE GRIEF EXPERIENCE

"All that day I walked alone. In the afternoon I looked for a church, went into a café,
and finally left on the bus, carrying with me more grief and sorrow
than I had ever borne before, my body in tatters and my whole life a moan."
Oscar Lewis
(as cited in DeSpelder & Strickland, p.197)

"Jemi lifted her face to the sky and howled her grief. The sound was a wailing shriek
that froze the blood in Johnny's veins. This was what a banshee's scream
would sound like. . . .This despair. This grief. This anger underlying both.
Charles De Lint
(1995, p.295)

Before sensing experiences can be located within the experience of grief, it is necessary to understand the grief experience itself. In this chapter, themes which in emerged in this study as central to the grief experience are presented. Throughout this and the next three chapters, themes are enriched by presentation of quotations from participants. While these quotations are not exact, unnecessary words such as "uh," "like," and "you know," have been omitted, and identifiers have been added, such as "my father" in place of "he," great care has been taken that in no case was the meaning intended by the participant compromised. Where relevant, themes have been expanded with examples from the psychological literature, popular literature, and film. These are included with descriptions from the present study because it seemed more useful to compare them by topic than to discuss them separately.

Death as an Assault

Death is experienced as an assault. Survivors reveal this quality of their grief experience in the language they choose to describe it. Julia describes her loss, "It's still like a fresh wound." A wound is "an injury to the body, as from violence, accident, or surgery, that involves the laceration or breaking of a membrane and usually damage to underlying tissues"; it is "a cut or breach due to external violence", "a mental or emotional hurt or blow". (These definitions and the ones to follow, Mish, 1984.) These phrases elicit images of violent injury. The power of the violence is apparent from the descriptor Luke uses to describe his experience as he receives the news of his brother's death: "It was horrible". The root word "horror" derived from the Latin for "to tremble," means "painful and intense fear, dread, or dismay" and "intense aversion or repugnance". Dread is "a great fear especially in the face of impending evil." Thus, fear and trembling are felt when danger is extreme; when our defenses are no match for an assault. The power of death is indeed formidable. It is, in one definition, "the destroyer of life represented usually as a skeleton with a scythe". Death, then, can be a violent and evil force, which mows down the victim and leaves the survivor trembling, lacerated and broken.

Despelder and Strickland (1983) suggest a comparable understanding of the experience of bereavement:

> Bereavement comes from a root word meaning shorn off or torn up—as if something had been suddenly yanked away. The word thus conveys a sense of a person's being deprived, of having something stripped away against one's will, of being robbed. Bereavement signifies a force that comes from outside as a violent, destructive action taken against us (p.193).

The Grief Process

The grief process is a process of responding to this assault. Of the survivors who participated in this study, Georgina reported utilizing the most varied set of responses. Furthermore, although she was one of the two participants with the most recent loss, she seemed, at the time of the last interview, to have achieved both resolution of her grief and personal growth. Consequently, her case was considered to represent a possible range of healthy responses to grief with which to compare the responses of other participants. However, when the experiences of other survivors were compared to those of Georgina, it became clear that the idea of a healthy/unhealthy continuum of responses came from my own preunderstanding and did not emerge from the data. The responses of those who had not, by self-report, reached resolution in healing, were not different from Georgina's. Rather the sources where Georgina gained strength and support were sources where these survivors encountered more pain. Because of this, their grief was not specifically in reaction to the current loss alone, but became a reaction to the impact of the death and other woundings. Nevertheless, the responses utilized by Georgina to promote her grief process will be described here because they encompass responses made by other participants. Furthermore, the coherency of presentation is maintained by focussing on one individual's story. Following that, in Chapter Six, it will be shown how other survivors, whose grief processes were less straightforward, were not less resourceful. They also used these responses, but encountered woundedness rather than healing. It will also be shown, in Chapter Six, that for each individual there was a different constellation of woundedness. While there were commonalities in the components of woundedness, the phenomenological world of each individual was different, and grief processes could not be understood without understanding the individual context of grief.

Attending to Feelings

The most successful response to feelings was to attend to them. This meant both to listen to feelings and to actively respond to them. Georgina's grief began with her father's suffering and she responded initially with anger. Her father was dying from congestive heart failure. During the last three months of his life he lost about sixty-five pounds and for the last two he was bedridden. Most painful was his loss of dignity. He could not feed himself or go to the bathroom by himself. He could not even lift a spoon to feed himself. Georgina attended to her feelings; she both acknowledged and expressed her anger. She confronted the one who had angered her.

> *I felt anger towards God and I questioned God, "Why? Why are you letting him suffer."*
>
> *I didn't want to see him suffer, I used to pray to God to tell Him, "Take my Dad now because I don't want to see him suffer anymore." All my Dad did was serve you for the last 30 years. Why? Why, why does he have to go through this? Why do we have to see him endure so much before he actually...? And I used to pray that God would take him away so I didn't have to see him suffer.*

Georgina also felt anger toward her family for her father's suffering.

> *It was almost like he hung on because he didn't think it was time yet, because some people were faltering. And towards the end I started feeling resentful toward my family because they were just hanging on, you know. No matter what the cost.*

When her father's condition reached a point where the family had to decide whether to try life support or *let nature take it's course,* Georgina took the opportunity to address the issue which had caused her anger toward her family. Furthermore, by expressing herself, she was able to exert influence; extreme measures were not used.

Georgina had been able to deal with her anger but she reported being unable to cry.

> *My grieving was all physical. I went through headaches, dizziness, not so much going into the feelings. I think it has a lot to do with how I was brought up. My mother was very abusive. It was almost like, "Okay, you want to cry about this, I'll give you a reason to cry." For this reason I don't show my feelings. I tend to hesitate first because the trust is always in question.*

Demonstrations of Love for the Deceased

For most survivors the need to demonstrate their love for the deceased continued after death. Georgina responded to her inability to cry by utilizing it. By finding pride in her strength, and by using her strength in performing acts of service to her father, she was able to use a quality which might have hindered healing to promote her grief process.

> *When he did pass away, I was left with almost sole responsibility for what songs to be sung at the service, what color coffin. Nobody had the strength to do it; everybody just fell apart.*
>
> *I did everything. I did the eulogy for my Dad. And I was really strong; I couldn't believe how strong. Before they took the body into the church for the last time,*

and the family got to spend a little bit of time, I talked to him and I said, "I'm not going to let you down. This is what I want to do for you."

Everybody thought, "How can you do a eulogy on your own Dad?" There were a lot of people came up to me and said, "How can you do it? Where do you get the strength?"

And the answer I had then was, "It's not the strength but the love that I feel for my Dad. That's what it is, the love.

Seeking and/or Accepting Support

Extended Family

For participants in this study, the support of extended family was observed more as a lack than a resource. This was a dimension, however, which was consistently noted. Neither Georgina's mother nor her brothers and sisters were available as resources for healing. Her mother had not been loving; she had been abusive mentally physically and *in all forms*. Georgina reported that she and her mother had no connection, and after the death her brothers and sisters were no longer together.

In spite of the lack of connection with the mother, this was an area where woundedness had been largely resolved.

I have gone through a lot of help, worked through stuff about my mother, and there's a sense of peace there, where the way she parented me is the only way she knew how. She didn't have a very rosy life when she was growing up, and there was a lot of sexual abuse in her family. So for me to be sexually abused, and for her not to acknowledge, it is part of the way she was brought up. So that's my justification for her being a bad parent. It's time for me to move on, and try and patch things up as much as possible. She's my mother. I love her as my mother. At least I'd like to think I do. And I'm content with that.

I don't think there was ever hate. I think there was more hurt.

Nuclear Family

Participants often made reference to members of their nuclear families and it was clear their support was important. Georgina named her husband and children as her *number one resource*. There were specific incidents which illustrated how the support of her husband was beneficial to Georgina. Approximately two months after the funeral Georgina accompanied her husband to a baseball tournament: *It was good. He wanted me to get away. He knew what I was going through, losing my Dad, and he knew how close I was to him.* Her husband demonstrated his easy acceptance of her sensing experience. When she perceived her father's presence and told her husband, he said, *I hope that feeling never goes away.*

Georgina's husband was also helpful because of his sensitivity to, and support of, Georgina's continuing bond with her father:

My Dad's name was Alfred George but everybody knew him as "Fox." Not too many people knew his real name. This Christmas my husband bought me 2 stuffed foxes. That's why I have them in my office.

Others

Georgina received further support from others besides her family. Her therapist was one source of support, and she also sought and received assistance from others through books.

I have a therapist and I shared the experience with him. It was almost like he understood. He didn't say, "That's part of your grief; that's why you're feeling that way. He didn't say that. He said, "There is such a thing as," he called it a name, "where you have special connection even after they're gone."

I read the book called Embracing the Light because I wanted to connect with some of the experience that I have, and a lot makes sense.

I'm reading a book right now called Adults Who Have Lost a Parent and I read about all the different experiences people had. . . .It's helping me connect with some of the things, that "this is natural, this is part of grieving".

Support was not forthcoming in one instance where Georgina described her sensing experiences to a colleague. Georgina reported this as a negative experience; however, she was able, once again, to turn an experience which may have hindered her healing into one of benefit to her. She used the as an opportunity for self-examination and a reassertion of her belief in her relationship with her father.

And she started asking me, "What is this connection?" And after I told her all the things I'm telling you she looked at me and said, "Don't you think maybe you're a little bit confused? You know, when some people go through their grieving, they put this person on a pedestal, that this person can never do any wrong."

I said, "My Dad did a lot of wrong; but to me, everything that he did with me was right. My Dad told me there was lots he would never brag about, that he did wrong. But he did his best.

She brought me back down to earth and I really had to think about it. I decided, "No, I'm not putting him on a pedestal.

Deceased Available through Sensing Experiences and Memories

Sensing Experiences

Survivors experienced the presence of their deceased as coming in response to a need. In this way the deceased was seen as providing support during grief. The support of others was appreciated by Georgina but she did not believe the connection with her father could be replaced. She gave an example of what she meant by this:

> *My husband can hug me as much as he can; it's not the same hugs my Dad had.*

However, Georgina reported, there was no need for anyone else to fill a void left by the deceased.

> *There is no void. He's still there.*

Georgina's father was still perceived as being with her and responding to her needs in a caring way. It was through sensing experiences that responses were forthcoming. When Georgina was unable to cry, it seemed to her that her father responded by "taking care of" the feelings she kept inside.

> *But the feelings that I kept inside, my Dad was taking care of almost.*

Gerogina gave an example of how her father took care of her feelings. The experience she described took place about two months after the loss. Georgina was missing her father and needed to cry.

> *Evenings were pretty bad because that's the time I used to spend with my dad, whether he was in the hospital or at home. I was really feeling stressed. The kids were fighting and my husband was getting frustrated and I was getting frustrated. And I was missing my Dad. Everything just came in. I left the house and my husband asked where I was going. I told him," I'm going for a drive."*
>
> *I needed to cry. I started driving and for the first time I felt like maybe I should go to the graveyard, maybe go park over there. This is about 10 o'clock at night. It's dark; I can't see anything. I pulled into the graveyard, and his grave was just straight ahead. And I sat there. That feeling of wanting to cry when I left my house went away. I couldn't cry, couldn't bring myself to cry; I had tears in my eyes. I said, "Dad, I miss you so much."*
>
> *And it's almost like he spoke to me. And he said, "You know that grave over there, that's just my body. My spirit is with you." I didn't hear it in my ear but I felt it in my heart. That's what he said.*

Georgina was very clear in explaining her sensing experiences as her father responding to her needs.

> *I never had to call my Dad because I needed him. I think [the experiences] happened in the times he felt I needed him. It's just like any other normal person, when you're going through a hardship you forget everything else and dwell in the hardship. I think it comes when he thinks I need to be reminded.*
>
> *When I think about him he's there. And when I'm missing him, he's there.*

I do believe he's actually taking care of all the things that I need to go through, or don't have to go through. I do believe he's taking care of all of those. The example is when I went to the graveyard where I felt the need, "Maybe I should come here and bawl my eyes out. I actually believe he took care of that and said, "That's just my body over there. I'm here with you."

The specialness I had with my Dad began when I was just a little kid, began when I was born. And that hasn't been altered at all. It's still strong. It's just the physical part of it has been taken away.

I do believe he's still in our hearts, spiritually and in the good memories.

Memories

Memories of the deceased were a focus of conversation for most of the deceased. Georgina experienced her father as still being present in spirit through sensing experiences and, also, still being present through memories. Both were utilized in coping with her grief, but she was careful in differentiating between what she believed to be healthy and unhealthy use of memories.

It makes me feel better to have good memories when I miss him. I do believe he's still there. And he always will be there. That's never going to go away. Body dies; body goes away. But the memories that you have, they'll never go away.

I don't feel that emptiness people talk about because my heart is so full of good memories about him.

I think it's important remembering the good times spent; I think it's very important. Not to dwell on them, I don't think it's healthy. But when I start missing my Dad I start remembering. It's always a different thing. I start remembering what my Dad would be doing and times that we had. And a lot of times it makes me feel better. I don't dwell on him. But I think it's very important to keep in touch that way.

When Georgina said that memories never go away, and that it is "important to keep in touch that way" she was attesting to the value of ongoing connection. She was stating that the experiences of their relationship were present in an ongoing way. She also stated that talking about her father revives the connection. In this way storying becomes a healing activity. Georgina related the following story to illustrate what their relationship was like. It occurred at the time when she left a marriage in which she was neglected and abused.

I got a lot of negativity from my family. They didn't support the fact that I was leaving a marriage. My mother was very verbal about it and said, "How can you be so stupid to leave a stable marriage, to leave an RCMP. I felt really down and I felt unsupported.

I was really depressed because I had no means of work; I had never worked in the time I was with him. And I had two little kids.

Georgina's feared her father would judge her because of his religious views but he did not react as she had feared.

> [He said] *I don't want you to worry what everybody else thinks because it's you that has to be happy. And if you're happy then I'm happy.*
>
> *It was almost like nothing else mattered after that. He brought me back up and I started to back to school.*
>
> *That's the way he was even when he was really suffering. He had really bad days where we thought he wasn't going to be able to make it and in the end he always smiled.*
>
> *I don't think it was things he did. It think it was the love that he had that he shared, the love he showed to all of us. He always put love in whatever he said.*

This and other memories are available to Georgina, and they are not overshadowed by unresolved issues. What was missed when her father died was the expression of love. This loss was a source of pain, but the memory of this love was also a source of strength.

> *My biggest [disconnection] was the physical part of it. It's not being able to touch him and kiss him. [He gave] lots of hugs, lots of kisses, lots of everything, telling, "I love you's," and, "You're doing a good job, I'm proud of you." I still miss him physically terribly. I almost see him doing things outside, you know. That's the physical stuff. I still miss that. And my spiritual stuff, I felt the disconnection there for awhile, but I'm feeling like it's coming back again. And I don't think it'll ever go away. I think ten years from now I'll still feel the same way.*

Making Meaning

Of Suffering of Deceased

Georgina was initially angry with God because of her father's suffering which she viewed as unfair. However, she came to regard her father's suffering as meaningful, as something he deliberately tolerated for his children. Her father struggled with death and, to some degree, was triumphant.

> *It's almost like he hung on, like he didn't think it was time yet, because there were some people faltering. He lingered for an extra length of time, you know, for his kids.*
>
> *I think he was fair. I think he was for a year, letting us know that he's going to be leaving us. I don't think anybody can be more fair about death. He told us for a year, "I'm going to leave you". You can take over from here.*
>
> *He told us towards the end when we used to sit around his bed at the hospital, "When I woke up this morning I thanked the Lord for giving me another day with my kids." It got to the point where he was thanking God every day for giving him life for that day. It was a gift to stay alive in spite of the suffering.*

Georgina took full advantage of the time her father struggled to give her. In order that his suffering would end, she was willing to let him go, but she was unsure how she would have coped if she had not had this time with him before he died. By the time he died, she had said everything she needed to say; she had given her father permission to leave and she had said her good-byes.

Of Death of Deceased

Georgina viewed death as an end of her father's suffering, and a transition from this world to the next. Her achievement of peace, at the time of her father's death, was directly related to this belief.

When he took his last breath, I felt this overwhelming sense of warmth, and overwhelming sense of peace. For me it was the peace that he doesn't have to suffer anymore. And he's going to the place he's told us for the past year he was going to. He has planted his seeds and he's moving on now. And that's where my peace came from. He was moving on to be with God.

Of Life of Deceased

It seemed to be important to survivors that they could see the life of the deceased as meaningful. Georgina's grief process was facilitated by her belief that her father had fulfilled his purpose in life. He had fulfilled his purpose as a father; he fulfilled his purpose through his love of others; and he had also fulfilled his purpose through preaching the gospel for 25 years.

I don't feel shortchanged; I feel rich. I feel my Dad had a purpose in life and that was to plant the goodness in his children's hearts, and to teach them the right way of life. And growing up as children we saw him, a really warm loving compassionate person. He told his kids everyday how much he loved them.

He loved everybody. And I think it takes a special person to have that love, that immense love for everybody.

And he didn't treat anybody any different; all his kids he treated equally. He told them how much he loved them. He told his son-in-laws and his daughter-in-laws how much he loved them like his own children. And the son-in-laws and the daughter-in-laws were as devastated as we were. It was almost like it was their own parent. One of my sisters-in-law said to me about a couple of weeks ago. She said, "You know, I feel so lost without your Dad. Because he made up the 'I love you's' that I never get from my Dad.

Of Life and Death in General: Worldview

The ability to make meaning from her father's suffering, his life and his death gave Georgina advantages in dealing with her grief. In the process of making meaning from the loss, Georgina's accepted her experiences of her father's presence as real. Rather than dismissing what did not fit with her preconceptions she changed her beliefs to accommodate her experiences. In doing so she found great comfort in her grief without resorting to denial of his physical death.

> *I would never have thought about death in that way before. Before I felt like when somebody dies, they die and that's it, you've lost them forever. I've lost him physically. But he's there spiritually in all ways.*

Through the character of Theresa in Message in a Bottle, Nicholas Sparks, bestselling author of The Notebook, identifies how memories function to strengthen the survivor.

> *You taught me that it's possible to move forward in life, no matter how terrible your grief. . . .Because of you, I am hopeful that there will come a day when my sadness is replaced by something beautiful. Because of you, I have the strength to go on (p. 321).*

Making Meaning of Loss through Personal Growth

Some survivors were able to use the grief experience as a motivation for growth. In the process of making meaning of her father's life Georgina moved beyond healing and into personal growth. Less than a year after her father died, Georgina received and accepted a promotion at work to a position of greater responsibility. While the promotion could be taken as evidence of healing, there is stronger evidence. At the time of the last interview, Georgina had set goals which demonstrated an ability to use the loss as a catalyst for growth.

> *Up until the day he died, he guided me, taught me. And then after he was gone, his spirit lived on here to guide me. He planted a seed and I can continue to grow from that seed. I'm going into the ministry. So this job is temporary. I have a much more important job.*

Georgina was very clear in stating that the goal is her own, not her father's. Her goal has now become to be what she wants to be, and to live her life to the fullest.

> *My Dad didn't want me to be a minister. My Dad taught me by the way he lived. From that I learned and this is what I want to be. It's not because he wants me to be a minister, he wants me to go to this church or that church. I'm doing this because it's what I want. He always said, "I taught you the best I can; it's up to you now how you are going to live your life."*
>
> *When my Dad died I came to the realization that people are not around forever. The people who are gone have taught you well. You live your life to the fullest the way you were taught.*

Georgina's reaction was similar to that observed by Devers (1997) who stated that when survivors believe their experience is real, they are reminded of the importance of what they do, and want to lead more spiritual lives (p.99).

Georgina's grief process was described here because it represented the most varied set of responses to loss, and because a coherency was most easily maintained by presenting one person's experience. As can be seen in the outline of grief responses at the beginning of Chapter Eight, other survivors used the same responses and, in some cases, experienced healing. However, in other cases, as is shown in the next chapter, when survivors turned to these sources, they encountered areas in their lives where there was already pain. In this way, pain from other sources was added to the pain resulting from bereavement.

Chapter Six

WOUNDEDNESS

"The remorse. . .was worse; the most unpleasant thing I have ever experienced,
I was attacked by memory. . . .
The unhappiness and guilt went round and round in my mind.
I thought I was going mad, and perhaps I did."
Mary Jones (1988, p.60).

"An odd by-product of my loss is that
I'm aware of being an embarrassment to everyone I meet. . . .
R. has been avoiding me for a week. . . .
Perhaps the bereaved ought to be isolated in special settlements like lepers."
C. S. Lewis (1961, p.11).

Georgina's grief process which, as described in Chapter Five, culminated in healing and growth, was one of actively responding to her feelings and experiences. However, in many cases it seemed that other survivors had turned to the same resources, and experienced not healing, but more pain. Grief thus became not only a response to the current loss, but a response to the combined impact of death and other woundings. By examining the wounds of other survivors, within the structure of resources utilized by Georgina, it was possible to identify how old issues which have not been resolved became a part of the current grief experience. The label of woundedness is applied here in recognition of the evidence that wounds were not experienced discretely, but rather in relation to one another, and to the individual's lifeworld.

Strength and Support

Family

Family members, who would ideally be available as resources for strength and support, were, in some cases, sources of pain. In the past, Luke had not felt accepted by his surviving brother, Mark; and, after the loss, he was hurt by a lack of closeness in the family. It was clear to Luke that family members should be available to each other in times of grief and he could not understand the lack of responsiveness he encountered in his sister, Vicki, and in Mark.

My older brother. . .is a great person but. . .a very superficial person. He's a very good looking guy. He works out with weights, is a bodybuilder, and has an ego to match. . . .You had to fit in to be good enough for Mark. He's the type of person who liked to hang around with the rich and famous, so to speak. You had to be there *to rate with Mark. Matt was not like that.*

The only one who contacts my mother on a regular basis is me. My older brother and my sister don't come and visit her. My one brother has been there once in the past four months. One brother, hah! That's the only one who could visit. My sister has been *over there twice since Matt died, and that's been a year. They live. . .you could walk, it's not far. You'd think it would bring people closer together. In all the time we've lived here [two years] I have never received a phone call from my sister, or from my brother.*

I wouldn't say Vicky and I were really close. But reasonably. I always went over there, always visited. It just seemed to me that I was the one always doing that. And I got tired of it. And then when Matt died I thought, God, this is not a good time to get tired of it.

At Christmas time this year, I thought, I'm not going to phone them. They can phone me, to heck with them. I broke down. I had to phone them to tell them Merry Christmas [laughs]. I phoned my brother. He wasn't home but I left three or four messages on his answering machine. But none of them phoned back.

When something like. . .this happens, God, I hate to think that I was living five minutes away from Matt and I hadn't seen him in a year, yet we got along great when we saw each other. And I said that to my sister when I talked to her. It hasn't changed. It hasn't changed anything, though. I don't get it. Like, what's wrong?

Like Luke, Indrea was wounded by the indifference of her brothers and sisters and articulated clearly the relationship between this wound and the pain of the current loss.

I'm looking after my Mom, because my sisters and brothers have apparently abandoned her. They don't phone to see how she is. They don't bring anything. She'll be 88 in April. They have abandoned her. I have to put up with my Mom. It's all around sadness. I feel sorry for my Mom. Why don't they bother to come? [Tears]

Unresolved abuse issues contributed to woundedness where the surviving parent had been a source of abuse. Indrea claimed to still hate her mother because her mother had abused Indrea and her siblings when they were children. The dimensions of Julia's pain may be understood from how she reacted to it when she was fifteen years old, and how she felt at the time of the interviews:

I got pregnant intentionally. It was because of my mother. According to her, her girls were bitches, her girls were whores. I got pregnant intentionally to show her. I knew about birth control. I knew about condoms. I knew this is what happens if you have sex without protection. All the things my Mom has told me were wrong, but this one thing she was going to get right. Yes, I am going to get myself pregnant, and then, yes, you'll be right that I am going to be a whore, I am going to be a bitch.

There was so much anger in me toward my mother that hasn't been resolved, and I don't think it ever will be unless I make it happen. I'm still angry at her.

Understandably, when Julia's father died, she did not seek comfort from her mother. Julia identified the missing ingredient in their relationship which would have promoted healing; she could not turn to her mother for love. It was clear that, for her, this wound was incorporated into the grief experience.

Others

Unresolved issues related to others outside the family may also be part of the grief experience. Indrea, perhaps more clearly than any other participant, articulates the link between woundedness related to unresolved issues, and the grief process related to a current loss.

> *I've been so depressed and so mixed up. Being a native I have been abused by white people many, many times. I've been cheated, physically abused by them, sexually abused.*
>
> *My grief is not done. It won't be done until I have let go of the hate that I have acquired throughout the years for everybody. For myself and for other people. When that hate goes away, then the grief will go away I think. I think it will dissipate some. It won't be forceful. It won't be as strong. I'll be a little more contented. I will understand.*

Deceased: Memories

Memories of the deceased which were, for some, a rich resource for healing were, for others, a source of pain. As survivors remembered the one they mourned, they also remembered unresolved issues. Indrea's memories of her father and of their relationship were primarily memories of abuse and hatred.

> *I grew up in a very hostile environment because my Dad didn't really want to marry my Mom. My Mom and Dad were continuously fighting. He hated my Mom and he took it out on his kids, mainly me because I was the oldest, and my other brother and my other sister. I hated my Dad for many, many years. I hated him.*
>
> *He used to hate me, never called me his daughter, never came near me, never touched me, never even put his hand on my shoulder, never. He treated me like a little dog, "Go away. Go hide somewhere. You stink," or "You're ugly." That was his attitude toward me. I did a little bit of research and I was told by a psychic, 20 years ago, or maybe 15, that when I was being conceived my Dad was full of hate and also needed nurturing and wanted to have love. Between love and hate there's a thin layer. He hated me, and yet he loved me as his oldest daughter, because I create a lot of influence on people and I can feel it. It's a sorrow, not so much missing him, because I was so scared of him because he was a disciplinarian; he was mean. But in the last days he wasn't; he sat there; he just sat there.*

For Celeste, as for Indrea, the pain of loss was compounded by a preoccupation with painful memories. Celeste's mother had died alone and it was particularly difficult for Celeste to remember that her mother had always predicted this.

> *She had said a lot of times, "When I die, I'm going to be alone because nobody cares." And that really bothered me because it seemed that she was right. She must have thought, "Nobody does care about me; nobody's here."*

And it just took the longest time for me to accept that she died all alone. It would be awful for her, having said that and it comes true. That exactly what she used to say because she used to drink and then when she'd drink she used to cry and that's what she'd say. And yet everybody was always around her.

The grief process was made more difficult for Celeste by the way in which she reacted to these memories. She did not sleep for three days after her mother died.

I think I was trying to punish myself. Every minute I could spend with her I wanted to spend. And I knew then that it wasn't right. It wasn't healthy what I was doing to myself.

Celeste's relationship with her mother had been deeply influenced by a rebelliousness Celeste found painful to recall. Good memories, which may have been a source of strength, were blocked as Celeste sought to avoid pain.

I couldn't think of all the good things we've done together. I'd always just think, "Why did I do that to her? How come that time she asked me to do that, how come I did this?" That's how I used to think. Every time I thought, I'd just block her out. It's just going to hurt me when I think about her.

And there was so many little things but I built them up so much because from the time I was small I was always really rebellious. Everything she told me to do I would do the opposite. So I had to learn to forgive myself for what I've done to her and to ask her to forgive me for being the way I was.

When Celeste asked her mother posthumously for forgiveness, memories of sexual abuse surfaced. Until that time Celeste had had no memory of being sexually abused. The remembering was accompanied by a realization that she had blamed her mother for the abuse. In this way, past abuse issues became part of the current grief process:

She had no way of knowing this happened, but in my mind somewhere, I guess, I have always blamed her for not looking after my safety and I think a lot of times, too, that's why a lot of things I did. . . I think deep down it was the sexual thing. When I was sexually abused. I kind of think I had that under there, hidden. I was really, really bad. I did everything I'm not supposed to do because I felt like I wasn't clean. I wasn't good anymore. And I was just small. That happened when I was about seven or eight and I just kept doing all these things to make me deserve that.

For Indrea, as for Celeste, regrets over rebelliousness became part of her grief experience when her father died.

I was never kind to my Dad. I was rebellious. I hated him. I didn't understand.

Why did I understand after he died? People don't understand unless something happens. People get jolted to become aware and awake. Lots of things happen for a good reason.

I didn't accept my father until he was gone.

Mike, too, had memories which were a source of regrets which contributed to his grief:

Will was a person who I figured was very mixed up and needed help. I felt he definitely needed guidance and values in life.

I just wish I could have been someone who helped him. . . .Hindsight, I would have paid more attention to him. I would have tried to do more things with him. . . . I could have made things easier for him, making sure he got a job. . . I don't know, there's endless things you could probably do. Take him fishing. Take him to the farm. It may not have helped, but it may have made a difference.

Julia had good memories of her father but she also had memories which evoked anger and inner conflict:

Although I had a lot of angry feelings toward him because of reasons that have passed, he was always there for me. I feel there's so much in the past that happened with our family, with my Mom being my Mom, and why my Dad didn't do anything. It's just so long and complicated. I had always wanted to ask him, "Why? Why Dad? Why didn't you take us away from Mom?' And I never did ask him, so I guess I'll never know. We should have all have been taken away from her. Maybe if that had happened things would have been different.

Making Meaning

Of Suffering of Deceased

There was difficulty for some survivors in coming to terms with the suffering of the deceased. This was a factor in Indrea's grief.

I feel like there's no need for my father to suffer like that. That's why I cried.

Mike also identified the suffering of the deceased as an aspect of his grief experience. While Indrea found difficulty understanding why her father had to suffer physically while he was dying, Mike found difficulty in coming to terms with the mental suffering his friend, Will, had endured before his suicide.

That his life was so terrible on this earth that he had to end it that way, I'm sad for him that way.

Of Death of Deceased

There was also difficulty for Mike in making meaning of Will's death.

> *Here was a young healthy person who could have had a good life if he only could have got straightened around.*

Of Life of Deceased

The lack of meaning in her father's life seemed to be the main component of Indrea's grief. She had reached no resolution with this issue at the time of her final interview.

> *Why did my Dad come to planet Earth and suffer so? He never had a mother's love. He married my Mom who is not very pretty and doesn't have a nurturing nature. My Dad never had a nurturing nature and then he had to end up with someone like my Mom. I feel a lot of sadness; I cried. About a year later I would just start to bawl, in my house, alone by myself, start to bawl for the pity that I felt for my Dad. Why did he have to suffer? Why did he come to earth here, never knowing love, never knowing contentment.*

One way in which Georgina made meaning of her father's life was by living according to his values. This finding is compatible with that of Klass (1996) who observed that the bereaved need to make the life of their deceased "count" in their own lives. Julia's grief process seemed to be inhibited by her inability or unwillingness to follow her father's teachings. Julia expressed conflicting feelings about living in a common-law relationship while knowing her father wanted his children to be married.

> *There's a lot of the kids didn't do what he really wanted us to do. He wanted us to follow his footsteps and go to church. Although we're not destroying our lives or anything, it's just that he was a really religious man and he wanted all his kids to be married. He wanted that.*
>
> *I'm not married and it's gotten to the point where I feel guilty to be making love to my common-law husband because I think my father is watching me. . . .I told my common-law husband that. I've always felt guilty living common-law and we're not married.*

It is unlikely this belief, that her father was watching, was related to her sensing of presence. She had the same belief before the sensing experiences occurred when she felt angry after her father's death:

I always felt angry. And I knew, "I can't feel like this because my Dad is watching me. And I'd keep it inside me.

Of Life and Death in General: Worldview

While other survivors in the study gained comfort from their religious views, Luke had no clear beliefs concerning life and death. He reported that he had tried to decide what he believed but, "It keeps changing". As we shall see in the next section, Luke experienced multiple losses which he viewed as unexpected, unfair, and untimely. His losses have left him with a feeling of vulnerability that may be seen as both beneficial and problematic:

Every now and again, I get on one of those kicks, and I don't know why, it just pops into my mind that, jeez, it could happen any day or any night. Which is actually, at times, a good way to think, a good way to live, because you're thinking, "This could be my last day. By golly, I'd better look at things properly. So there's no harm in that but at times I think I get a little overwhelmed by it.

It is clear that the areas from which Georgina was able to access resources for healing were areas of further pain for some survivors. These areas were: in gaining strength and support from family members and others; in gaining strength and support from the deceased through memories and sensing experiences; and in making meaning of the suffering of the deceased, the life and death of the deceased, and of life and death in general. Death, for these survivors, was experienced as an assault, but only one in a series of assaults.

Constellations of Woundedness

Individual survivors in this study had often sustained injuries before the death, injuries that had not completely healed at the time of their loss. Although there were commonalities in the components of woundedness, as has been demonstrated in the above discussion, for each survivor there was a different constellation of woundedness. For this reason the grief process cannot be understood without considering the phenomenological worlds of the individuals involved. Indrea, Luke, Julia and Celeste, each displayed a specific constellation of woundedness which became part of their grief processes. Celeste's, which might be labelled "Working through Woundedness" has been made clear in the section earlier in this chapter concerning memories of the deceased. For Indrea, this constellation was characterized by a poverty of existence.

"Dying seems less sad than having lived too little" (Steinem as cited in McDonnell, p.100)."

The theme of woundedness as a global experience is perhaps most clearly illuminated by Indrea's story. The wounds she had sustained were overwhelming. She grew up in *a very hostile environment*. As was described earlier, Indrea's father hated her; she and her mother *never connected at all and the relationship is still like that*. That these wounds had never healed was obvious. She said of her father that she did not accept him until he was gone, and of her mother:

My Mom is a cold, very stubborn person, sharp-tongued. . . .My Mom is very stubborn. . . .I hate her for that. . . . I feel sorry for my Mom, because I hate her. I hate my Mom for the way she was abusive to us when we were kids.

There were further wounds which had not healed. Indrea, who is native, had been the victim of repeated abuse by white people. She had been cheated, physically abused, and sexually abused.

My grief is not done. It won't be done until I have let go of the hate that I have acquired throughout the years for everybody. For myself and for other people. When that hate goes away, then the grief will go away I think. I think it will dissipate some. It won't be as forceful. It won't be as strong. I'll be a little more contented. I will understand. I can become enlightened. I will have overcome the unnecessary garbage that I wear.

At first, Indrea's wounds seemed to be about abuse, but that was only part of what is painful here. When Indrea stood at her father's coffin to say goodbye, she looked down at his body and felt helpless:

As I was standing there, my Mom beside me, feeling grief and feeling really sad, I thought, "Is this the way we're all going to end up? I can't do anything. I feel helpless." So I said to my Mom, Mom, you know, Dad did have nice hair." So we didn't say anything for a long time. We just stood beside the body.

This image is appalling in the starkness of confrontation with mortality and in the barrenness of life lived. That this poverty of existence was a major aspect of Indrea's grief process, is evident. Indrea continued to grieve for her father's suffering in never having love from his mother and because he ended up with someone like her mother.

When my Dad passed away, at 86 years old, he hated my Mom because he was more or less forced into marrying her, not because she was pregnant; in the olden days the family used to choose marriage partners. . . .He didn't have a choice and he was hateful.

Why did my Dad come to planet Earth and suffer so?

Why did he come to earth here, never knowing love, never knowing contentment. That was the last message I got from him was to look after my Mom. He must have had pity for her. Maybe he had love for her because sometimes I feel my Mom chases us away, indirectly. The sadness that I felt for my Dad was so unbearable.

In many ways the suffering of Indrea's father was her own suffering. His poverty of existence was her own. We can alter the wording of her plea, and it applies equally, "She was never show a parent's love. Why did she come to earth here, never knowing love, never knowing contentment?" Her own goals had never come to fruition. She spent her days with a mother she hated:

I sit with my Mom all day for the last four years now since my Dad passed away. I'd like to write a book but I'm anxiously waiting. I finally got a travel trailer; now I have to get another truck. And I want to go to B.C. and live. I want to do Reiki. I've taken a Reiki course; I want to do Reiki degrees 2 and 3. I believe that we have energies of the body. I can't talk to anybody here because they couldn't care less about anything. They are not in tune with the unseen things.

I'm patiently waiting to go to a place that is special for me, to go to a retreat where I can bring out my. . . I feel a lot, see a lot, hear a lot of things. I see a lot, I feel a lot of things.

Even in an audience I feel it; I see it. When I start smiling, here the whole room starts to smile. And I'm ugly, and I'm very aloof and cold, that's the way it is in the room. I think I have a lot of power, and I'd just like to use it.

Indrea's pain was not only about her father's death and any approach taken to healing her woundedness would necessarily encompass all of the dimensions of her grief including the final element of her father's physical suffering. His pain had clearly become a part of her pain. But, like her father, Indrea had determination to live.

He was in pain for about three years. He suffered from prostate cancer. I can feel it. I can see it. I can even feel the pain. His skin started to sort of wither away and become very pale. But he had determination to live.

Sudden death: Unpredictable, Unfair, Untimely

Indrea's grief was a constellation which included abuse, lack of personal fulfillment, lack of meaning in her parents' lives; as a whole it could be identified as "poverty of existence". Luke's woundedness included unexpected, untimely death; unresolved issues between himself and his brother; work endeavors incompatible with his values; multiple losses in his past; and lack of closeness in his extended family. Luke's experience is not illuminated, however, by applying these descriptors; it is more useful to examine the composite of experience. The overwhelming evidence of Luke's experience is that death may come at any time: it is unpredictable, unfair, and untimely.

Luke's earliest experiences with death were when he was 18 and three friends, young, healthy, and presumably filled with potential, died within three months. One was his roommate and two were young men who had been his best friends since childhood. First his roommate, Brian, committed suicide.

He was 18 at the time, 17 or 18. We had rented an old house together and he shot himself. I was working graveyards that night. . . .I went home the next morning and police cars and everybody was over there. And, "Sorry, Brian shot himself last night".

Next, Luke's two best friends died. David, Rick, and Luke had been friends since Grade 3; they grew up together.

Rick was getting married. He had gotten a girl pregnant and they decided the right thing to do was get married. They were 18 or 19. The night of Rick's wedding a big fight broke out, huge fight. And the police came and I saw them throw David in the back of a police car. And what happened is they hand-cuffed him, threw him in the back of this police car, and he was face-up, started vomiting, and choked. So he died that night.

One month later, to the day, it was Rick, the guy who got married that night. It was Rick's birthday and they were having drag races; he worked in an autobody shop. He stepped around the fence to see where the cars were and one car went a little off-track and ran over Rick. Killed Rick that night.

It was horrible, just a horrible, horrible time in my life.

The sad part was, I suppose we felt like we had brought some of those things on that night because we were fighting amongst ourselves. Not us three, but the group of us. We had people that were at that wedding and they're the ones who started the fights.

These deaths were followed by more which were particularly unfair and untimely: Luke married and had two children; both died from a genetic disorder. And then Luke's brother died. A big, powerful, physically fit man, full of life, was suddenly, inexplicably gone. Luke expresses some of the difficulty with this kind of death; it leaves no opportunity to mend bridges.

For me, the biggest part was, I think everybody has a few bridges that weren't completely mended. And to someone who's dying slowly, as awful as that is, you do have a chance to make amends in some respects. But, jeez, you know, if you happen to say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing, or the other person does and it's not really rectified before, before something like that happens, it's just so hard to deal with too. You know, the, "If only."

In this case, the issue unrectified was that Luke had been deeply hurt by his brother, Matt shortly before Matt died. This hurt continued after the death and became an integral part of the grief experience. The first incident Luke mentioned, where Matt let him down, was when Luke went on an extended trip to Asia. Matt offered to take care of payments and insurance on Luke's new car while he was away; in return Matt would have a car to drive. When Luke returned, no payments had been made, and the car had been repossessed.

Luke was philosophical about his brother's behavior, and to a degree was able to justify it. But when Matt let Luke down again, Luke found it more difficult to excuse his brother's behavior. Luke's circumstances had changed. He was married; he had a wife and a small child, and his financial position was vulnerable. The business he was operating with his other brother was failing, and Luke was doing small jobs on the side to make ends meet. When Matt wanted his house remodelled, he hired Luke to do it, however, Luke was never paid for the job. This lack of payment represented a blatant disregard for Luke's needs and the needs of his family.

Like the deaths, this assault was, Luke admitted, completely unexpected. The magnitude of the Luke's hurt is evident from his description of his reaction. He repeatedly described his experience using the phrase, "that choked me." To "choke" is "to check normal breathing of by compressing or obstructing the windpipe" or to "become or feel constricted in the throat (as from strong emotion)"; in this usage "choke" is usually used with "up" as in "choked up and couldn't finish the speech" (Mish, 1984). Matt's behavior, then, cut off Luke's access to what he needed to sustain life, and left him so emotionally overwhelmed he was unable to speak. He tried to resolve the issue with his brother to no avail. Matt repeatedly promised to pay but no money was ever forthcoming. Luke took a forbearing attitude toward Matt's behavior.

> *I didn't get overly excited about it, and I'm glad I never. Because if I would have excommunicated him right there and then that would've been a horrible way to have things end off. And then he would have died two years later and we wouldn't have spoken at all during that time. I wouldn't have been very good at all.*
>
> *You still had to love the guy because he had that carefree, lackadaisical type of attitude. You had to love him for the way he was. So I never let that stuff bother me. That's just the way it was.*
>
> *If I was to do those same things to him he wouldn't give a shit. You know, so what? He'd still phone you up Friday night and say, "Hey, you want to go for a beer and shoot some pool [laughs]. That's just the way he was. He didn't care, you know.*

Perhaps, in light of Luke's past experiences with sudden loss, it was not surprising that Luke reacted as he did in this situation, and no doubt his grief experience was aided because he had done his best, however the price was high. Luke was left with another in a now formidable list of experiences of unpredictable, unfair, and untimely loss.

Aloneness and Guilt

Like Luke, one aspect of Julia's grief was related to a crisis of relationship with the deceased. Julia became pregnant when she was 15 years old and to face the ignominy of telling her father:

> *Breaking the news to him was the hardest thing I've ever had to do. My Dad, I remember, was so disappointed when I told him. It was like his baby was pregnant. I had to tell him and it was so hard. I still remember the expression on his face was pure disappointment.*
>
> *I can't say he was disappointed, but he was hurt, not hurt. . . I don't know what. He was shocked, I guess. That's the only time he ever got up and walked away from me, and that's what hurt the most. He didn't know what to say to me.*

Julia's father had walked away, and there was no immediate healing of the breach. Julia's mother sent Julia away to live with her sister in northern Alberta, but Julia had the baby in Edmonton. The birth was complicated, that baby was born with spina bifida and almost died, and Julia was alone:

I had my baby in Edmonton; I was all alone there. That was really, really hard. I was recuperating because I had a C-section. And I was depressed; there was nobody there; my family wasn't there.

Julia describes her experience of aloneness as ending with her father's forgiveness, which suggests that she experienced the aloneness as punishment. Her daughter's disability, also viewed as punishment in the past, is also experienced as something she carries without the help she needs.

At the time of my daughter's birth, she almost died. I guess that's when I knew he had forgiven me. He said, "Everything will be okay. I'll be there for you if you need anything."

You know, you blame yourself for having a child with a disability. You blame yourself; you kill yourself; you beat yourself up. To make me see that what I did was wrong, God gave me a child that wasn't perfect. He punished my child to hurt me. That's what I always thought. It still hurts but not as much. I had to go through years of counselling and my father helped me with that, too. He said there was a reason why my daughter was born with a disability, and it wasn't meant to be as a lesson. He said to just go with what comes. It wasn't meant as punishment.

She has a lot of anger. Her self-esteem is really low. Because she's not out there walking around like all the girls are. She has to catheterize herself. And she doesn't walk normally. She has to walk with the aid of braces. There are a lot of things in her life that aren't right. She was going to a counsellor but, since the counsellor left, there's been nobody she can talk to besides me. And it's hard on me, too, because I carry that and it hurts me. And I wish there was somebody that could help her.

While the above experiences have discrete elements that have been identified as factors complicating grief (Rando, 1995), the individual grief experience is not fully illuminated unless the elements are examined in relation to one another and to the survivor. Each of the above survivors has a unique constellation of woundedness and grief outcomes seemed to be directly related to the nature of the woundedness.

This chapter has been devoted to a description of the grief process as it emerged from the data gathered from participants in this study. The purpose of examining the grief process was to provide an experiential context within which to place the sensing experience. While the above process was presented in a linear fashion, this is for convenience in presentation and perusal. Just as each individual, and each relationship, was different, so, too, were grief processes different. However, sensing experiences were part of each of these processes. In the next chapter, these sensing experiences will be described, and in Chapter Eight the sensing experience will be described as it fits into the grief process.

Chapter Seven

SENSING EXPERIENCES

"Things he said and did come back to me. Not the splendid gestures but the small ones;
A grin, a wink. From the corner of my eye I glimpse the grace of his shadow.
It is not the shadow itself but the grace that endures. I move in and out of my soul friend,
Part of his pattern as he is part of mine."
(Morgan Llywelyn, *The Druids)*

Because sensing experiences are the focus of this study, and because context is important in understanding experience, they are described here in full. An understanding of complete experience should also be useful in providing a basis for understanding discussions of factors surrounding the perceived presence of the deceased. It is hoped, too, that full descriptions may be valuable to other researchers whose focus of interest in this topic is different from the one pursued here. As in the last chapter, literary examples as well as examples from the psychological literature are incorporated with themes which have emerged in this study. In this way, they are included by topic rather than being considered separately.

Circumstances Surrounding Sensing Experiences

Participants in this study reported sensing experiences to occur under different physical and emotional conditions. Most, however, occurred in quiet surroundings soon after the loss, and in most cases survivors were alone. The amount of time which elapsed between the death and the experience of presence ranged from approaching zero to two months. Jane experienced her grandmother's presence before she was told about the loss; Julia's experience occurred approximately two months after the loss.

Relaxation and Quiet

The first few experiences described by participants in this study took place in circumstances conducive to contemplation. Mike, for example, reported that he was in a very relaxed state when his experience occurred two or three days after the funeral. He had gone to bed but had not yet fallen asleep. The quiet interior of a moving vehicle was the setting of experiences for two survivors. Georgina had experiences of presence both when she was a passenger and while she was driving. Something of Georgina's state of mind prior to her initial experience may be understood from this description:

> *I'm one of those people who travels a lot, by myself, and I just cherish those quiet moments because I'm alone. It's my time to think.*

The experience which occurred while Georgina was a passenger took place approximately two months after her loss. She was in the company of her husband, coming home from a baseball tournament, an outing she had enjoyed.

It was night time. I was quiet and he noticed and asked me, "Are you sleeping?" And I said, "No, but I'm feeling something."

One other sensing experience took place while the survivor was driving. It was approximately one month after his brother died when Luke had his experience. He was returning from a road trip, had stopped for the night, and was driving home early the next morning. When Luke was searching for explanations for his experience, he considered that he might have been tired, but dismissed the idea because he had only been awake a short while.

Settings of quiet and solitude were described by two other survivors whose experiences occurred while they were occupied in pursuits other than driving. Jane was at work in a hospital lab and was concentrating on a task. Hers was the only sensing experience reported in this study to occur before the survivor had been informed of the death. Celeste's experiences occurred over a period of time beginning the day of the funeral and extending for approximately two weeks. With one exception, Celeste's sensing experiences took place while she was in bed reading.

Distress

In some instances sensing experiences occurred when survivors were distressed. Indrea was at the church standing with her mother beside her father's coffin saying good-bye:

And as I was standing there, my Mom beside me, feeling grief and feeling really sad, I thought, "Is this the way we're all going to be ended? I, I can't do anything. I feel helpless."

So I said to my Mom, "Mom, you know my Dad had, he did have nice hair." So we didn't say anything for a long time. We just stood by the body.

All of the sudden I picked up, not audibly, I picked up my Dad saying to me, like he was right there, saying to me, "Look after your Mom.

I heard him, in my mind say, "Look after your Mom." And I thought, oh, well, I'm just picking this up and it's nothing serious, so I just let it go. It could have been my mind, you know; where did I pick this up? Why. . . why did I pick this up? I thought, "Well, don't worry about it."

So, like I said, my Mom and I were standing beside his body, just standing there quietly. And as I was about to turn around, or took a step, whatever it was, I moved anyway, and I heard that in my mind, "Look after your Mom." And that's what I'm doing. I'm looking after Mom. . .

It was him. It was his voice. I didn't hear it audibly. I heard him in my mind but not like he used to speak to me. I just picked it up like it was a transferring of thought from one person to the other. That's the way I picked it up. When he said that, I assumed, "He wants me to look after my Mom."

Circumstances were remarkably similar in the two sensing experiences where other survivors were distressed. In each case it had been approximately two months since the loss; and in each case there was a decision to go to the graveyard to cry. For Julia, this was a first experience of presence:

> *I really, really needed to see him. I felt like I needed to see him. Every time I needed to see him or talk to him or whatever, I'd take that one picture down. And then every time I looked at it, you know, I knew I needed to cry so every time I knew I needed to cry I'd take that picture down. But that one day, it wasn't enough. So I thought, "I'm going to go to his grave. I'm going to go to his grave and I'm going to pray and talk with him there."*
>
> *So I got into my vehicle and I don't even remember driving but I knew I needed to go to my Dad's grave so I went. I was kneeling down by his grave and I was just weeping. I wasn't crying or bawling, I was just weeping, you know and telling him that I missed him. Suddenly I got this really strong feeling of presence. It made me kind of look around; I thought somebody was watching me.*
>
> *When you say you see him, you don't really see him; but you could tell he was there. I felt this warmth. I could see him looking down at me, or he was standing there, or he was there. I know he was there because I could see how he used to smile and he used to have this twinkle in his eye. And I could see him. "I'm not here," he said, and he pointed at his grave. "I'm here," he said, [indicating her heart or her self]. That's what he said to me, "I'm not there, I'm here," he said [again indicating her heart or her self].*

Georgina's circumstances differed from Julia's in that her initial sensing experience had already occurred; she had felt her father's presence while she was driving.

> *Evenings were pretty bad because that's the time I used to spend with my dad, whether he was in the hospital or at home. I was really feeling stressed. The kids were fighting and my husband was getting frustrated and I was getting frustrated. And I was missing my Dad. Everything just came in. I left the house and my husband asked where I was going. I told him," I'm going for a drive."*
>
> *I needed to cry. I started driving and for the first time I felt like maybe I should go to the graveyard, maybe go park over there. This is about 10 o'clock at night. It's dark; I can't see anything. I pulled into the graveyard, and his grave was just straight ahead. And I sat there. That feeling of wanting to cry when I left my house went away. I couldn't cry, couldn't bring myself to cry; I had tears in my eyes. I said, "Dad, I miss you so much."*
>
> *And it's almost like he spoke to me. And he said, "You know that grave over there, that's just my body. My spirit is with you." I didn't hear it in my ear but I felt it in my heart. That's what he said.*

The conditions under which these experiences occurred seem to be similar to conditions which are used deliberately to induce trance. Repetitious phrases and a monotonous tone of voice are often used. Driving may also quality of monotony that could also lead to a receptive state of mind. It is not clear whether the activity with which Jane was occupied was routine or not. Celeste was reading at the end of the day. For other survivors in this study, quiet moments following outbursts of emotion were the circumstances for sensing experiences. These could also be times when the mind would be receptive. This idea is supported by evidence from the Devers (1997) study in which some participants reported that they were so exhausted physically and emotionally by their grief that their defenses were down and they were in a receptive state. According to Devers (1997), most people who have had sensing experiences believe that "certain states of consciousness are more conducive to it than others" (p.19). Conant (1996) asserted that there was one widow in her study for whom the sense of presence had "the form of a natural trance". On the other hand, Devers noted that it was quite typical for people to be engaged in an activity when the experience occurred (p.22). Some of her participants believed that the only prerequisite to experience was receptivity to the idea. One participant in the Devers study reported that she was able to induce at will a sense of her grandmothers presence (p.23).

Qualities of Sensing Experiences

Duration of Experience

There was considerable variation in the duration of sensing experiences for the participants in this study. The duration of Jane's experience was the most fleeting. She heard a whispered word and felt a touch on her shoulder; that was the whole of her experience. Indrea's experience was similarly brief; her perception was of "hearing" her father's voice in her mind; she "picked up" a phrase, however, in her case the phrase was repeated. For Mike and Luke, although neither was able to specifically identify duration, experiences were more extended; Luke estimated his to have lasted "some minutes," and Mike "several minutes. . .or maybe one minute. . . I don't know". For each of the above participants there was a single sensing experience. For the remaining participants there were repeated experiences of varying duration. Celeste's experiences were ongoing for approximately two weeks; Julia's and Georgina's experiences were ongoing at the time of the last interview.

Inspirational writer, Catherine Marshall (1951) was the only person, from those descriptions encountered in my readings, who identified a specific duration of experience. Her husband, Peter Marshall, then chaplain to the United States Senate, had been taken by ambulance to hospital at 3:30 a.m. because of severe chest pains. She had been unable to accompany him because she had to stay at home with their small son. Peter Marshall died at 8:15 that morning; Catherine went to the hospital and sat with him there:

> When I opened the door and stepped quietly into the bare little hospital room, it was filled with the glory of God and with two vivid, transcendant Presences. Peter was not in the still form, but was hovering near in tenderness and love. . . .There came a specific time, exactly fifty minutes

> by my watch after I had entered the hospital room, when those two luminous Presences left me. Suddenly, the room was empty, cheerless, cold, and I shivered. It was time for me to leave, too (p.239).

Ideas about duration are similar in the popular imagination. In literature and film, depictions of sensing experiences are of different durations. In Braveheart (1995), William Wallace experiences fleeting experiences of his deceased wife's presence. She warns him of danger in an experience which occurs as he is awakening, and she appears to him again as he is dying. In Shakespeare's Hamlet (1997/1602) and Field of Dreams (1990), the deceased fathers' appearances are less brief. In the films Ghost (1990) and Always (1990), the deceased are almost constantly present, but the bereaved sense their presence only fleetingly. And, finally, in the films Truly, Madly, Deeply (1992) and To Gillian on her 37th Birthday (1996), sensing experiences are presented as occurring over extended periods of time.

Normality of Experience

The perception of the presence of the deceased seemed normal to some survivors. Julia reported that she felt neither surprise nor fear when her experience occurred:

> *The only thing I found weird about the whole thing was I didn't go to his grave anymore. . . .I know he's not there. That's weird. I can honestly say he's not there. It's just the remains of his body; his soul, I guess, is not there.*

In Jane's case, it was this very normality of experience that surprised her. The idea of ongoing life, however, was part of her worldview:

> *That, I think is what surprises me most, is something like that happening to me and it not surprising me, not even fazing me. Just sort of taking it in stride. I have always believed there is another life that you go to from this life. The next life is on a higher plane and the next life is on a higher planet yet.*

This normality of experience is also described by Conant (1996). She describes this as one of the findings of her study: The events were acceptable and familiar to the widow. "They were not disturbed by them (p.188)." Devers (1997) reports being surprised the matter-of-fact attitude displayed by many people:

> For most people, "peaceful" best describes how they feel during the experience because this extraordinary event seems perfectly rational while it's happening, and ultimately they feel good about it (p.72).

The character of Nina, in the film, Truly, Madly Deeply, written by Anthony Minghella (1991), conveys the feeling of normality in communications with her dead lover, Jamie:

> Mostly when I'm walking, at night, or anyway, alone, if I'm frightened, then he'll turn up, he'll, he'll talk, about what I'm doing, you know, some advice, he'll say, "Don't be frightened." I've told you, "Walk in the middle of the road at night". . . .and I would have been feeling low, you know, very alone and hopeless and – and then he's there, his presence, and it's okay, it's fine, and I don't mind and he tells me he loves me. . . .I feel looked after, I suppose, watched over. You see, he never says anything profound or earth-shattering, you know, he doesn't say, "Well God thinks this," or. . .or about the planet or world events. . .it's all, "Go to bed, brush your teeth. . . .Lock the back door."

Modalities of Experience

Experiences of presence were visual for both of the male participants in this study. In both cases it was the face of the deceased that was seen. Mike's experience was qualitatively different from Luke's in that it included a perception of radiant light surrounding the face. Although nothing was said during Mike's experience, there was also a conviction that a communication had taken place.

Auditory experiences were reported by Jane and Celeste. The process by which Indrea perceived her father's message might be described as telepathic, "I just picked it up like it was a transferring of thought from one person to the other." It is less easy to label the modality in one of Georgina's experiences. She describes her perceptual process not as not heard with her ear but as felt in her heart. Several experiences which consisted of sensations of presence are referred to in this study as intuitive.

William James (1916), to illustrate the sense of reality which accompanies the perception of "something there," recounted the experience of an intimate friend of his who he described as "one of the keenest intellects" he knew. Although the following experience is qualitatively different from those of participants in this study the description clarifies the feeling of reality which accompanies a sense of presence:

> I have several times within the past few years felt the so-called consciousness of presence. . . .It was about September, 1884, when I had the first experiences. . . .After I had got into bed and blown out the candle, I lay awake awhile thinking on the previous night's experience, when suddenly I felt something come into the room and stay close to my bed. It remained only a minute or two. I did not recognize it by any ordinary sense, and yet there was a horribly unpleasant 'sensation' connected with it. It stirred something more at the roots of my being than any ordinary perception. The feeling had something of the quality of a very large tearing vital pain spreading chiefly over the chest, but within the organism – and yet the feeling was not pain so much as abhorrence. At all events, something was present with me, and I knew its presence far more surely

> than I have ever known the presence of any fleshly living creature. I was conscious of its departure as of its coming: an almost instantaneously swift going through the door, and the 'horrible sensation' disappeared (p.61-62).

James (1916) attempted to identify the modality of experience, or, as he described it, the "organic seat" by which the feeling is perceived:

> It is as if there were in human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call "something there". . .more diffused and general than that which our special senses yield. . . .Nothing could be more natural than to connect it with the muscular sense, with the feeling that our muscles were innervating themselves for action (p.58-63).

Ineffability

Although Julia's later experiences, ongoing at the time of the final interview, were intuitive, she had some difficulty identifying the modality of her initial experience. It could be categorized as visual, like the experiences of Mike and Luke, but she seemed unable to describe her mode of perception. In her use of the phrases, "I could see him looking down at me," "he pointed," and "I could see how he used to smile," she would seem to be describing a visual experience. However, she specifically stated that "when you say you see him, you don't really see him".

Georgina was commenting on the ineffable quality of experience as she described her efforts to explain her sensing experience to her sisters:

I tried to explain it to one of my sisters. I said, "Go inside, go inside yourself. Start feeling the things you used to feel when you were with Dad. Maybe that connection will come to you." But I don't think they know what I'm talking about because I don't know what I'm talking about.

Neither Jane nor Mike was able to identify the modality by which parts of their perceptual experiences occurred. Jane described this unexplainable knowing that it was her "Gran" who died:

The voice was soft, and why I knew it was her I have no idea. *Because it could have been my mother, she wasn't a well person. My father had passed away. It could have been any of my aunts and uncles, you know, because they were all getting up in years. It could have been my brother in a car accident or something. There's a lot of people it could have been. But I knew it was Gran.*

Mike described in a similar way, his perception during his sensing experience that Will was all right:

> *Nothing was said but nothing needed to be said. He communicated to me that he was okay, and that he was going somewhere.*

Luke's description is evidential of the difficulty in articulating the feeling which experiences of presence evoke:

> *It's just an indescribable feeling. . . and I can't explain it, and it's just something that I'll never forget. It's not a, "Oh, that guy stepped around the corner and scared me," you know. It's not that type of a fear. It's a more of a. . .It's just a very different feeling. . . I don't know how to describe it. . .*

Sensing Experiences as Different from Memories

Georgina was adamant in stating that her experience was different from a memory:

> *The difference is, a memory is a memory. It makes me feel better to have good memories when I miss him. But an experience is a totally different thing. I still feel him around me.*

Julia was also certain that her sensing experience was different from a memory but she was unclear about the quality that differentiated the two:

> *I don't think it's anything the same because a memory of him would be of us travelling around Alberta. And I just don't know how to explain it. It's nothing he ever did before.*

It is possible that the distinction made here, particularly in regards to Julia's statement, may be related to an idea of memory which excludes the possibility that elements from memory could be retrieved and combined in a creative way (Baker, 1992; Gurney & Myers, 1889).

Tangibility of Experience

Sensing experiences in the visual modality were experienced as very real.

A Face in the Mirror

Luke describes his experience as *real, really real:*

> *I just looked in the rearview mirror in the van, and it. . .there. . . his face was there. It just, it was Matt.*
>
> *So I drove to a rest stop in the road and pulled over and during that time I just kept looking in the mirror for a long time. And he was there.*
>
> *It would have been minutes. I don't remember exactly how long.*

> *He was smiling and. . . Matt always had the crooked glasses on, and that's the first thing I spotted. And the big smirk. He wore the same pair of glasses I'm sure, the same style, ever since he started wearing glasses. And they were always broken. Always. [Laughs]*

Moody (1993, 1996) describes a number of anecdotal accounts, mainly historical, in which perceptions of presence involve mirrors or other reflective surfaces. He also reports on his research in which mirror-gazing is used as part of a technique by which apparitional experiences are induced. This technique was modelled after that which may have been used in the psychomanteums of ancient Greece.

Radiant Light

The tangibility of Mike's experience is evident from his descriptions:

> *I found it amazing. I found it real. . .*
>
> *I saw this big round light, this radiant-like-a-sun light. But in the center of it was this big glow. I guess you'd say like a tunnel of light. It went for a long ways back. It was the center part that was the tunnel but there was also glowing light all around it. The center part was bright and more pronounced.*
>
> *It was just. . .his face more or less. . .and it was glowing all around him. . .[makes hand motions in lines outward from his own face]. . . .It was a yellowy light. . .and the eyes were smiling. . .a big smile on his face. . . .*
>
> *He didn't say anything but I had the overwhelming feeling that he was happy.*
>
> *Nothing was said but nothing needed to be said. He communicated to me that he was okay, and that he was going somewhere.*
>
> *I never had another moment like it. I never had one before and I never had one since. . . .Here is a person who had died and a week later he's smiling at me. . .*

Guggenheim and Guggenheim (1996) include five descriptions of visual experiences accompanied by bright light in their collection of anecdotal accounts of sensing experiences. When I located these accounts, months after Mike had described his experience to me, he identified the first description as almost identical to his own. The only difference was that, in Mike's experience, the bright light came from behind an image. This dimension of Mike's experience was matched in fifth example in Guggenheim and Guggenheim. The experience Mike identified as almost exactly like his own was described by a teacher whose former student, born with Down's syndrome, severely retarded and physically handicapped, had died. Mike reported that this experience mirrored his own in the color and brightness, in the manner of communication, in the understanding that the deceased wished to send a message, and in the ending of experience when the message had been received:

> Three days later I was in my bedroom, and I suddenly became aware of a very bright blue and gold light of tremendous brilliance. There

> are no words in our language to describe these colors. A sense of the magnitude and beauty of this being was impressed on me as this light.
>
> It became very clear that this was Joshua and that he wished to send a message to his mother. His message was simply that he was happy and free. Now he could laugh, now he could dance, and now he could sing!
>
> When Joshua was sure that I had received the message in a telepathic way, he was gone (p.68).

There is also a portrayal in film which compares with this experience. The final scene in Ghost (1990) is so like the experiences of radiant light that it is interesting to speculate about whether the origin of the scene was from a sensing experience.

Sensing experiences were described as very real by both Luke and Mike. The reality of experience was described in an example from the psychological literature. A woman from the Devers (1997) study stated:

> He looked so real, no different than you or me. He looked just like he used to; there was no difference (p.42).

It would seem, from descriptions included in the following section, that experiences in other modalities are also convincingly real.

Powerful Feelings of Presence

The power of intuitive perceptions can be understood from the following descriptions. For Julia, the sense of presence was so real she looked around to see who was watching her. Celeste experienced her sensation of presence as waking her from sleep:

I'd feel her and I'd know if I opened my eyes that she'd be standing there, and I'd know what she'd be wearing. When I opened my eyes she wasn't there, but the presence was still there. And it was always on the foot of my bed on the side I was sleeping on.

It is apparent in above descriptions that survivors' experiences are very real to them. In two different experiences Georgina reported sensations of presence so tangible that she had the impression she could reach out and touch her father:

It was almost like I could just reach out and touch him, and I could feel the warmth.

I'm feeling something. . . .My Dad is in the van with us. I can feel him, he's right here. I can touch him. I can reach out my hand and I can touch him.

Jane was the most adamant of the survivors in her defense of the reality of her experience:

That happened. I know it did. I know what happened.

William James (1916) is again helpful in clarifying how the evidence of experience overpowers the evidence of rationalism. The following statements, made in the context of describing experiences of the presence of God, were very similar perceptually to other experiences he had recounted of sensing of presence:

> They are as convincing to those who have them as any direct sensible experiences can be, and they are, as a rule, much more convincing than results established by mere logic ever are. . . .If you do have them, and have them at all strongly, the probability is that you cannot help regarding them as genuine perceptions of truth, as revelations of a kind of reality which no adverse argument, however unanswerable by you in words, can expel from your belief. . . .If we look on man's whole mental life as it exists, on the life of men that lies in them apart from their learning and science, and that they inwardly and privately follow, we have to confess that the part of it of which rationalism can give an account is relatively superficial. It is the part that has prestige undoubtedly, for it has the loquacity, it can challenge you for proofs, and chop logic, and put you down with words. But it will fail to convince or convert you all the same, if your dumb intuitions are opposed to its conclusions (p.73).

Moody (1993), whose research involves inducing sensing experiences, also describes the reality of experience. Until he tried the procedure himself, he had been perplexed by the convictions of his subjects that their visionary experiences were real:

> I was convinced that if I saw an apparition it would be different. If I have an experience like that, I thought, I won't be fooled into thinking it is real (p.18).

He prepared for his experiment by recalling dozens of memories of his maternal grandmother, whom he had decided to attempt to see. He looked at photographs of her, and evoked a sense of her kindness. The presence he experienced, however, was of his paternal grandmother:

> I don't remember having seen any photographs of her at the age she seemed to be during this encounter. . . .Rather, I knew this woman through her unmistakable presence and through the many memories we reviewed and discussed. In short this woman was my deceased grandmother. I would have know her anywhere.
>
> I want to emphasize how completely natural this meeting was. As with other subjects who had experienced an apparitional facilitation, my meeting was in no way eerie or bizarre. In fact this was the most normal and satisfying interaction I have ever had with her.

> I realize how people can assume that these apparitional facilitations are hallucinations As a veteran of altered states of consciousness, I can say that my visionary encounter with my grandmother was completely coherent with the ordinary waking reality that I have experienced all my life. If I were to discount this encounter as hallucinatory, I would be almost obliged to discount the rest of my life as hallucinatory too (p. 21-22).

This tangibility of experience was also reported by Conant (1996) who stated:

> The vividness of the experience amazed them. The comparison to hallucinations was voiced spontaneously five times and was always denied. There were *not* hallucinations. . . .Other widows described experiences where they were startled by a vague or indistinct image or touch. They seemed to be amazed by the emotional power of the experience more than by its vividness because of the conviction they had been in contact with the spirit of the deceased (p.186-187).

In this chapter, the nature of the sensing experience has been explored. The circumstances under which sensing experiences occur was examined and the qualities of the experiences themselves were described. In the next chapter, the experience is placed in context, considered as part of the grief process as a whole. Finally, in Chapter Nine, the principle findings of the current research will be the focus of discussion. These will be compared with findings from the psychological literature. Implications for counselling and for future research will also be discussed.

Chapter Eight

SENSING EXPERIENCES
AS PART OF THE GRIEF PROCESS

> "Nothing you love is lost. Not really. Things, people—they always go away,
> sooner or later. You can't hold them, anymore than you can hold moonlight.
> But if they've touched you, if they're inside you, then they're still yours."
>
> Bruce Coville
> (1991, p.138).

The grief process, as it emerged from the data in this study, was a series of responses to the assault of death. Survivors identified the sensing experience as one of these responses. The attribution of meaning to the experience was also important as part of a need to make meaning of life and death: of the life and death of the deceased, and of life and death in general. The role of the perceived presence of the deceased during grief can best be understood by placing it within the structure of the grief process as outlined below. However, it is critical to understand that, for these survivors, the grief process was not linear. Rather, responses were interwoven in complex patterns that were different for each individual.

Structure of Grief Process / Outline

DEATH AS AN ASSAULT

It's still like a fresh wound (Julia).

RESPONSES

Attending to Feelings

*I think crying is one of the most wonderful things a human being can do
because it's a healing process (Julia).*

Demonstrations of Love for Deceased

*I think to hang onto grief means you still think about that person,
you still care about that person, you love that person, you miss that person.
Grieving in excess in not healthy, of course not. . . .
I can talk to someone about the good times, and it's a good thing,
and I don't get sad because I'm talking about him (Luke).*

Seeking and/or Accepting Support

- **from family**

*I tagged along with my husband to an old-timer's baseball tournament. . . .
He wanted me to get away. He knew what I was going through, losing my Dad,
and he knew how close I was to my Dad (Georgina).*

- **from others**

My father-in-law said. . ."You have to let her go and you have to look after yourself."
And I did start looking after myself (Celeste).

- **from God**

We prayed together and then I was able to sleep that night (Celeste).

- **from the deceased through sensing experiences and memories**

Ever since then [the experience] I've always felt safe.
I knew he was going to come when I needed him the most,
when I really, really need him (Julia).

Making Meaning

- **of suffering**

It's almost like he hung on,
like he didn't think it was time yet, because there were some people faltering.
He lingered for an extra length of time, you know, for his kids (Georgina).

- **of death of deceased**

He has planted his seeds and he's moving on now.
And that's where my peace came from.
He was moving on to be with God (Georgina).

- **of life of deceased**

To me meaningful is that she was a good mother.
A lot of things happened but she was a good mother, the best she knew how (Celeste).

- **of life and death in general: worldview**

I was brought up to be a Christian, to believe there was a hereafter or a heaven.
But I always doubted it.
It think it [the sensing experience] showed me
that there probably is someplace to go after we die.
By seeing him go. He was happy; he was smiling (Mike).

- **own life through personal growth**

Luke reassessed his lifestyle and was no longer working long hours away from his family.
The longer you're out there, the higher your expenses are,
and what you're missing at home, not having time with your wife and your kids,
and family, friends, the whole spectrum. . .It just wasn't worth it.

In the above outline, the sensing experience is identified as one among a number of responses survivors identified as part of their processes. In the following sections it is shown how meaning attributions were made and how, as a result there were changes in the grief process. As in other chapters, quotes from participants may be presented more than once if they illuminate more than one theme.

The Sensing Experience: Personal Grief Response or Response of Deceased

Attribution Process

Although survivors were unanimous in identifying the sensing experience as a response, there was ambivalence about whether it was a response of the survivor to grief, or a response of the deceased to the survivor. A struggle ensued as the individuals attempted to reconcile the evidence of experience to the evidence of logical understanding. For most participants this process resolved as a belief in experience, that is, they decided the perception of presence was real, and represented a response of the deceased. The attribution process, however, was not without difficulty. With one exception, every survivor displayed some distrust of their experience(s). Julia was the exception; there was no evidence that she questioned the veracity of her experience. Similarly, Celeste initially viewed her experiences of her mother's presence as real, but later she interpreted them as products of her mind. There was, however, evidence of continued ambivalence. Typically, survivors questioned the reliability of their perceptions, and for most, questioning was immediate. When Jane's heard a whispered, *Good-bye*, and felt touch on her shoulders, she thought, *Gran's dead*, but talked herself out of that. Her doubts were erased, however, after her grandmother's death was confirmed. Indrea initially displayed a similar distrust and dismissal of experience.

> *I thought, oh well, I'm just picking it up and it's nothing serious, so I just let it go. It could have been my mind, you know.*

However, when Indrea's experience was repeated, acceptance followed: *It was him. It was his voice*. Luke initially dismissed his perceptions in a manner almost identical to Indrea's: *I thought, "I don't know. It must be early in the morning."* While Indrea seemed undisturbed by her initial distrust of her perceptions, Luke attributed the seeming failure of his perceptions to mental dysfunction and reacted with fear:

> *I thought this was just really weird and it scared me to be quite honest. My first reaction was, "Wow, what's happening to me." I thought my breaker went or something. I didn't know what it was. Really, I was quite serious. . . .At first it scared the living daylights out of me.*

In truth, Luke made a number of attributions, one following the other, and each was accompanied by a different emotional reaction. When he first perceived the image of his brother's face in the rear-view mirror of his van, Luke attributed the perception to fatigue and dismissed it. Upon looking a second time he could still see the face, concluded that the perception was due to mental dysfunction, and reacted with feelings of fear. However, on the evidence that his experience seemed *real, really real* and because his brother was smiling, Luke decided that the experience might *really be happening* and it was *a good thing*.

Doubts were entertained by Georgina, only when she lost the feeling of presence for a time. She was regaining the sense of presence and her faith in its reality at the time of the first interview approximately nine months after the loss:

I lost it for about 3 months and I was starting to wonder what's happening; what's happening? Was all this stuff that I was feeling, that he was close to me, that I can actually touch him, was that just a part of my grieving? And I was starting to really question. And I was hard on myself. I felt so disconnected from him; I just felt lost because I couldn't connect with him anymore. And I actually started feeling like I had lost him for good. I've lost him physically but I was starting to really fear that I had lost him spiritually, and now I'm starting to feel that sense of peace and feeling him again. When I think about him he's there. And when I'm missing him, he's there. His spirit is still alive. I feel it around me. I feel it.

Mike's assessment of his sensing experience seemed to be more a differentiation between fact and belief than any serious distrust of his experience. Even when he was attributing the experience to his subconscious mind, he was asserting that Will had gone somewhere. Experience obviously held supremacy over logical explanation. He later acknowledged that while there was no way to confirm the reality of the experience, there was no grief after it had occurred.

I believe it was my subconscious telling me I don't have to grieve for him because he's all right. He's happy where he's gone. . .where he went. I don't know the answer to where that is. I guess you do go somewhere if I'm saying that. I don't know. After I had seen him go there, I wasn't sad about him dying. He was going away. If he was going away to nothing, why would he be going?

Maybe it's just my mind doing this to me to help me cope with it. I don't know. But it worked. Definitely worked. And maybe it really did happen. This I don't know either. Nobody can tell us. At the time it seemed very real to me.

Another factor in attribution of veracity of experience was reported by Jane and Mike. Both individuals trusted themselves and, consequently, trusted their experiences. As Jane reported, *I'm sure of myself. I know what I sense and what I feel, what I see, what I touch*. Mike was equally as sure of himself, *I don't hallucinate, I have never done it before and I have never done it since*.

In Mike's case, belief seemed also to be a decision. There was a disinclination to analyze the experience. Mike liked the way he felt afterward and did not want to jeopardize his faith by examining his experience:

I don't break things down. They're whole to me. I don't analyze and break things down.

I don't like to talk about it. It seems useless to talk about it. And I don't want to figure out why he went there or how come he went there or where he went because I'll never ever know. So why bother going into that? I know nothing else. And I like it left like that. I like it left as I last seen him. Because, when I start thinking about it, somehow my mind might change it now. And it may not be good like that. I was happy the way it was and I want people to. . .just leave it like that without having to thrash it over or think about it some more or anything.

In the published literature, Conant (1996) identified this kind of attitude as a category of experience for her participants:

> Women said that they did not analyze these experiences, that they just happened. These women felt they had learned they had to "go with the flow," to just accept the bereavement experience without trying to control it. These experiences seemed to fall into an area of experience that they did not scrutinize, but just accepted (p.189).

The theme identified in this study, of survivor difficulty with making attributions, was also observed by Devers (1997). She found that survivors who analyzed their experience scientifically were the most conflicted. In her study as in this one, for most survivors the struggle resolved itself in a belief in experience (p.104).

The theme identified here, of the presence of the deceased as a response to a need, is also part of the popular view of sensing experiences as depicted in literature and film. In Dickens' A Christmas Carol (1969/1843), Marley comes to warn Scrooge of the consequences of his behavior. In the films Always (1990) and Truly, Madly, Deeply (1992), the deceased are present to help their loved ones resolve their grief. Hamlet's father (Shakespeare, 1997/1602) comes so that his murder may be avenged; Sam, in the film Ghost (1990), stays with Molly to prevent her murder. These portrayals also resembled the experiences described in this study in another way. None of the survivors was in any doubt about the reality of the death.

Belief in Veracity of Experience Did Not Mean Denial of Death

Survivors belief in the veracity of their experience did not imply there was a denial of death. For Luke the opposite was true; it was when he experienced his brother's presence that the death finally became real to him.

It kind of sunk in more when I saw him that day on the road. And then I pulled over, cried for a half an hour, and even though I had cried numerous times before, it just seemed different that time, knowing that that was *it. And just kind of dealing with that.*

Georgina, too, was clear about the reality of her father's death.

I know my Dad is dead. He's gone physically, forever. But I do believe he's still in our hearts, spiritually and in the good memories. I do believe he's still there. And he always will be there. That's never going to go away. Body dies; body goes away. But the memories that you have, they'll never go away.

Indrea was the most adamant in clarifying that she grasped the reality of her father's death:

He's gone. I know that. I know when he died.

He was there. He's not anymore. He's not there anymore. He's long gone. He's gone. Gone.

This finding is comparable to that of Conant (1996). One of the widows in her study described this duality very well.

> I feel his presence. I know that in some way he is still part of my life. But I also am cognizant of the fact that he is not here making the decisions. He is not here shoveling the snow or doing chores. I'm doing that (p.183).

Another widow in the same study also described the experience of her husband being physically absent but spiritually present:

> It's like I'm talking to him the whole time I'm getting myself ready to go to work. . .Even though physically he's not here. . .mentally I have this continual conversation going on with him. It's as though my life has not stopped. . .And I really believe that it is the spirit that he had in his life that is still living on. And this is what I am communicating with, this inner spirit that he had that is bringing me to communicate with him. On a different level. That I am able to, to reach out and still have a communication going on (p.183).

Attributions and Impact on Grief

Sensing Experience Considered Sufficient for Healing

In two cases where experiences were accepted as veridical, grief was virtually eradicated. Both survivors' reported feelings of happiness following their sensing experiences. However, in neither case was the relationship a central one nor was woundedness complex. When asked if the experience had made a difference to the grief process, Mike replied:

Oh, definitely. After I had seen him go there I wasn't sad about him dying. I was happy for him. Maybe it's just my mind doing this to me to help me cope with it. I don't know. But it worked. Definitely worked.

Despite his claim that there was only happiness after the he perceived Will's presence, there is evidence that Mike felt some sadness. He was crying during the first interview, and when asked to identify what he was feeling, identified his emotion as, *Joy. Yes, joy.* Nevertheless he admitted to having mixed feelings:

> *I was crying about it but I was happy. You have mixed feelings. . .you're sad because of what happened to him. Yet, I'm happy for him because I know he's okay.*
>
> *It's almost like he didn't die. He just went away to a place where you can't. . . You just can't see him now. You grieve because you miss the person. . .because they were with you and now. . . .I felt happy for him. . . .I was crying but I was happy. . . .I had a relieved feeling that he was okay now. . .*

When asked if the sensing of presence had effected her grief process, Jane replied, *Yes, because there was no grieving.* It was clear that she found the experience healing, but it is also clear that there were other reasons for her lack of grief.

> *When [the experience] was like that I knew she'd died peacefully. So I just thought, "I'm going to miss you, but as long as you're happy, Gran, that's good." Because my idea is she's with her husband now, and she's happy. I've always believed that.*
>
> *There was no grieving that I can think of, because I knew she was happy where she was going and she wanted to go. She had been saying for the last 20 years that she wanted to go. She didn't want to be on this planet anymore because she was so tired. And she wanted to be with her husband, and he had passed away in '55. Twenty years without her husband, and having to do things alone. So she was just happy to be going to rest. I can honestly say I was happy that she was where she wanted to be.*

Clearly, Jane believed in an afterlife before she experienced the perception that her grandmother was present; and clearly, grief is partly allayed her grandmother's death was a "good death". Jane's grandmother had been old, tired and had repeatedly expressed a desire to go. Conversely, this was not the case with Mike's friend. Will had committed suicide and Mike was sad *that his life was so terrible on this earth that he had to end it that way.* However, the act of suicide did not seem to offend Mike's values. He expressed a belief that Will had done what he wanted to do and was now happy. Clearly, Mike had, at the least, been able to reach intellectual accommodation to the act, and clearly this accommodation was also related to his attribution concerning the sensing experience:

> *I found it amazing. I found it real. It felt, I felt he was smiling, he was happy. I think he was trapped in a world he didn't belong in. He didn't fit into this world. How he did it made no difference. He had tried to do it before. To me he needed out of this world because he didn't fit. The actual suicide didn't bother me because he wasn't happy here.*
>
> *It's almost like he didn't die. He just went away to a place where you can't, you just can't see him now. You grieve because you miss the person, because they were with*

you and now. . . But then I think you have to consider where they've gone. If it was so difficult for them to live here, and they weren't happy, and they're happy now, hey, why grieve for them?

The attenuation of grief in both these cases seemed to hinge on the conviction that the deceased was all right. Jane stated that she knew her grandmother had died peacefully, and both Jane and Mike expressed the opinion that their deceased were happy now. The relief experienced, as a result of these cognitions, is interesting in light of Horowitz's (1993) observation that the dead are often modeled as harmed rather than dead (p.264-265). This theme emerged also in the research by Devers (1997); most people in her study reported receiving messages that the one mourned was all right. And for most this meant that they, too, would be all right (p.25-26).

Georgina represents a third case where sensing experiences were accepted as veridical and given credit for healing. At the time of the second interview, she reported, "If there was ever pain involved in my grief, I haven't experienced it. . . .But if I ever lost that connection, if I ever lost that sense that he's around, I think I would be lost." Nevertheless, this was the loss of a central relationship and there was grieving. Grieving, Georgina reported in the first interview, was mainly for the loss of the physical aspect of her father:

> *It's not being able to touch him and kiss him. He gave lots of hugs, lots of kisses, lots of everything, telling, "I love you's," and, "You're doing a good job, I'm proud of you." I still miss him physically terribly. I almost see him doing things outside, you know. That's the physical stuff. I still miss that.*

Georgina also reported the difference in her feelings before and after the perception that her father was present:

> *It changes, and almost it brings me back down to where I should be. Before I was feeling lonely, feeling the need to cry, because I miss him so much. My grieving was all physical. I went through headaches, dizziness, not so much going into the feelings. . . .But the feelings that I kept inside, my Dad was taking care of almost.*

It seemed to Georgina, that her father took care of her feelings for her, *When I think about him he's there. And when I'm missing him, he's there*. His presence alleviated her grief and she was left with feelings of warmth and overwhelming peace. She believed he came when she needed him:

> *I guess right away, right after the funeral, I felt he was there. All the time, he was there all the time. Well, the moments, like moments. Almost everyday there was a moment that I felt that he was there. I'm one of those people who travels a lot, by myself, and I just cherish those quiet moments because I'm alone. It's my time to think. And, when I was driving, he was there with me. He was there everywhere I went.*

Sensing Experiences Promote Shifts in the Grief Process

Although there were obvious shifts in the grief processes of three other survivors following sensing experiences, these experiences were not considered sufficient for healing. Grief was ongoing for these individuals.

Unquestioning Acceptance and Attenuation of Grief

Julia attributed a shift in her grief process to her perception that her father was present, however, she did not believe that the grief process would ever be over. Julia seemed to experience no doubts about the veracity of her experience.

> *I guess he wanted me to know I could be with him any time I needed to be with him. I didn't have to go to his grave. I just have to ask for him and he'll be there, I guess. I don't know. That's how I interpreted it. . . .He's with me. The message was there.*

Julia described her reactions to the experiences of her father's presence. After the experience, feelings of anger and turbulence were replaced by feelings of peace and calm.

> *Sometimes you feel so much joy, that he's watching you from up there. And I feel safe. Ever since I feel safe. Before I saw, felt, I don't know what it was. I guess it's what they call a premonition. I didn't feel that way before that. It was hard. It was like being on a roller-coaster of emotions.*
>
> *I was angry. I was mad. I was. . . mostly angry, I guess. I was mostly angry. I'm positive he came to me because he knew. It did made the pain go away a lot. It sure, sure did. It'll always be there, it'll always be there. But now that I know whenever the need is there I always feel his presence around me. That's what I mean; I feel safe. Ever since then I've always felt safe. I knew he was going to come when I needed him the most, when I really, really needed him. I felt peace after that. Calmness. Peace. Peace, I guess, is the word. Whenever the need is there, I always feel his presence around me.*
>
> *I think death is one of the things that time cannot heal completely because you're always grieving. There is no end to death. There is no recovery. I guess you can recover, but not completely. He is a part of you. You wouldn't be here if it wasn't for your parents. So there's always that. There's always that. I don't think there's ever any end to grief, whether you've lost a loved one or whether you've lost a cat or a pet. It's an emotion that's always there. It's like crying, like getting angry, there's grief. That's how I look at it.*

Attending to Sensing Experiences / Shifts in Grief Process

There were experiences where it would seem that the process of healing was begun with the attribution that the sensing experience was worth attending to. A shift occurred for Luke after he decided that the his experience might really be happening and it was "a good thing". A shift occurred for Celeste when she decided the perception of her mother's presence was there to tell her something and she needed to listen. Luke describes his process of attribution and the accompanying shift in his grief process:

> *I felt content after I got over the initial shock of it all. It was just a good feeling. It was a sad time but a good time. At first it scared the living daylights out of me. "What the hell's he doing here? What's anybody doing in here besides me?" It was shock more than anything else. And, "There must be some cobwebs up there or something." It just seemed real. Like it was really real. And it was the sort of thing that, "I don't know if I should tell anyone about this or not," because they'll think I'm a looney tune, too.*
>
> *The range of emotions went from shock, of course, like a shocked, scared sort of feeling to a "Wow, maybe this is really happening. This is a good thing." And then when I pulled over at the road stop that was it. I probably sat there and cried for half an hour. It was a sad, I miss you, kind of crying. Then I kept thinking about it all day, trying to get him to come back in the mirror. "If I think about it really hard, maybe I can get one last look [laughs]. I had it. That was my last look. That was it. That was the whole thing.*

As Luke's attribution changed, there was an accompanying shift in his grief process. As he accepted that his experience might be real, the sense of unreality around his brother's death was broken. After the experience, there was a recognition that the loss was real. And with that realization came expression of grief. Worden's (1991) observation that there is intellectual knowledge of the reality of death first, and only later is there emotional recognition is supported by this dimension of Luke's experience. Luke described this process in replying to the question of whether or not the sensing experience had changed his grief process:

> *I think so. I think so. Because at that point in time I was so wrapped up in my own little world of trying to do this and to do that, from a work standpoint. And even taking that week off, I don't think I grieved properly when I was home. I was quite concerned about my mother because she was a mess, still is actually. She has a tough time with it today even. It was really, really tough on her.*
>
> *It kind of sunk in more when I saw him that day on the road. And then I pulled over, cried for half an hour, and even though I cried numerous times before, it just seemed different that time, knowing that that was it. And just kind of dealing with that. And then moreso, I think more grieving. It's probably still going on. When I watched that movie. . . last night, I sat there in tears throughout most of the show just because it was a brother-type movie.*

Celeste, like Luke, was not immediately receptive to her experience. She, too, initially dismissed her experience, however, her dismissal was not based on distrust of her perceptions. She did not seem to recognize immediately that her mother was gone and, therefore, would not be expected to call her. Again like Luke, when the presence continued, Celeste, reacted with fear. The basis of her fear was that she perceived her mother to be angry. Celeste's experience was unusual in that her fear and distress persisted for a relatively long duration. At this point, in the context of ongoing experiences of perceiving her mother's presence, she considered getting a priest to bless her trailer but decided that *this was not an evil thing*, rather it was *just something telling me something, and I wasn't listening.* This change in attribution, and her accompanying response to the experience, produced a shift in her grief process; her process of healing had begun:

> *This was happening every night. Jeez, for about 2 weeks this was happening every night. Every time I closed my eyes I knew she was standing there and then when I opened my eyes it would be gone but you could still feel a heaviness in the room. It was like somebody was there besides me. I could really feel it and then I'd get really scared. When I closed my eyes this person was telling me, "Open your eyes; you're not sleeping." That's how I felt; I was communicating with this person. I know it was my Mom but the guilt was so much in me like she was mad at me. That's how I felt her presence, the anger.*
>
> *In my mind I felt she was there; nobody else heard her or saw her except me. My mother-in-law was there one night. She came and stayed with me for awhile and that one night when I was looking for my mother walking down the hall. And I guess I kept saying, "Where are you?"*
>
> *And my mother-in-law asked me, "Who are you looking for?"*
>
> *And I told her, "My Mom." I said, "She's calling me." And that's when she sat me down and we prayed together and then I was able to sleep that night.*
>
> *And this went on until I started really trying to forgive myself.*

The experience of an angry mother returning to berate and judge, as presented in the film Like Water for Chocolate (1993), seems comparable to Celeste's experience, and intuitively as natural as the inner voice of judgment which is familiar to us all. Tita, the daughter who sees her deceased mother and receives her anger, responds in a way similar to Celeste's response. And when Tita finally confronts the image and denies her guilt, her mother appears no more.

Grief Not Attenuated by Sensing Experience

Indrea first dismissed her sensing experience and then accepted it as veridical. There seemed, however, to be little or no attenuation of grief following this attribution. There may be some healing but it was four years since the death and during the last interview Indrea was still experiencing a lot of sadness.

> *He spoke to me. He did. He did. I sincerely believe that he did. I must have been very special. I must have been. But he is not the type to show. He's not the type. He suppressed his feelings all his life. I noticed that.*
>
> *I was special. I had influence to look after Mom. He depended on me. That's the way I felt, dependable. I felt like that was a request that he had given me before he went back to the light. I feel like my Dad was talking to somebody special. He knew, "You'll do it. I know you will."*

> *When he said that to me, maybe I had that in my mind. I never really gave it a good thought why he would. In my mind I thought he did care; he was worrying about my Mom. In reality, he was worrying about my Mom. I think that that was his wish. That's what I think. I really believe it.*

Indrea obeyed the directive she believed her father communicated to her and looked after her mother, a woman she hated:

> *I sit with my Mom all day for the last 4 years now since my Dad passed away. I am obeying what my Dad told me before he was buried.*
>
> *Because my Dad was a disciplinarian, we did what he told us to do. He was the boss, a very serious disciplinarian, no funny business. If he said, "Go to work," we went to work. At that time I also thought I had to listen to my Dad because I listened to him all my life.*
>
> *It was my duty to look after my Mom. Because, when she was having babies, one after the other, being the oldest, I looked after my brothers and sisters. It was my duty. And it is my duty, I feel, that I look after my Mom now. I also feel sorry for my Mom because I hate her. I hate my Mom for the way she was abusive to us when we were kids.*

Indrea took the sensing experience as evidence that her father may have cared for her mother and responded with sadness.

> *Over the years, maybe he came to care for my Mom. Maybe he knew nobody would look after her. My Mom is not very pretty. She's not easy with her words; she's got a sharp tongue.*
>
> *I don't know why I have been very sad for the last while, but when my Dad said that to me, "Look after your Mom," I felt a lot of sadness. I thought, "Why did my Dad come to planet Earth and suffer so?"*
>
> *Maybe he had love for her because sometimes I feel my Mom chases us away, indirectly. The sadness that I felt for my Dad was so unbearable.*
>
> *I didn't have no hate for my Dad, just the greatest sadness. It's not explainable how sad I felt. I feel sorry for my Dad.*

Devers (1997) identified a theme similar to the one found here; meaning attribution was also related to outcomes in her study:

> The more creative and open-minded they [survivors] were, the better they moved through their grief. Having a positive, spiritual outlook was a key component to both their acceptance of the experience and their resolution of grief (p.104).

Devers identified as most creative, the people who viewed subjective and objective realities as merely different perspectives:

> Because these people did not adhere to one specific dogma, they created original internal realities that contributed to a strong sense of self. . . . Many in this group placed paranormal phenomenon squarely within the realm of science. They saw it as something science simply did not yet understand. They offered possible scientific explanations such as parallel universes, subtle energy bodies, and theories supported by quantum physics. . . .Seeing the entire universe as a spiritual place made these survivors more prone to weave science and spirituality into one (p.104).

The finding in this study that the effects of sensing experiences on grief processes are related to survivors' attributions of the meaning, is supported by Devers' similar finding. At the time of the last interview, the attribution process seemed to be complete for the majority of survivors but, as we see in the following discussion, for some this process was ongoing.

The Sensing Experience as a Response of a Need

Healing effects accompanied survivors' beliefs that their deceased had communicated with them. However, what the communication meant to the survivor was also critical. There were four dimensions which seemed to influence outcomes. Healing effects were most profound when the following interpretations of experience were made: (1) that the well-being of the deceased was assured; (2) that the deceased cared for the survivor; (3) that interpersonal issues had been resolved or no longer mattered; and/or (4) that the connection was ongoing between the survivor and the deceased. It has been shown in Chapter Five that, for Georgina, the above interpretations had all been made and healing was profound. For other survivors the process was more complex. The more closely survivors' interpretations were aligned with those listed above, the more beneficial the impact was of sensing experiences on grief processes. Indrea made only one of the above interpretations and seemed to receive little or no healing from her sensing experience.

Indrea

Indrea did not interpret her experience to as evidence of healing in the relationship with her father. Rather, the communication was understood as an authoritarian directive; obedience meant that Indrea would shoulder the burden of caring for a woman she hated. It is possible that the situation could have been beneficial had it lead to an improved relationship with her mother. There was no evidence of such healing. Furthermore, although she interpreted the experience to mean her father found her dependable, there was no reassurance that her father loved or cared for her.

Indrea believed her father had gone back to the light and that his spirit continued on as an individual. This would seem to imply that he would be safe and well, but she seems to find no comfort from this belief. The sensing experience was incorporated easily this belief system which she attributed to the teachings of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh. This controversial character was a philosophy lecturer at the University of Jabulpur in India in the early 1960s (Dolphin, 1997, p.58). He later built an ashram in Poona, and a utopian town of Rajneeshpuram near Antelope, Oregon.

> *We're just like stars, you know. We're just like stars. We're like little lights. We have this light. I feel warmth, that warmth is part of light; the sun shines on me. And when I rub my feet against the ground, they create static. That is electromagnetic. I also cling. Just like a magnet clings together, I cling to the earth core. And when that magnet is released, when you hold it so far away, there's no way it's going to go back unless you hold it closely. You break the magnet. . . you broke the cord.*
>
> *I'm not happy about it but I know that my Dad's. . .soul has returned to the light. When my Dad passed away I knew he didn't suffer anymore, that his life, his vital force, his light went back to where it came from. I know that. I knew it. And nobody can tell my different. [I know] because it makes sense. I've studied a lot about this. It makes sense.*

These were Indrea's intellectual beliefs, accepted because they *make sense* to her, but they did not seem to bring her comfort. She expressed another viewpoint that may have been more influential at a experiential level:

> *When a person comes upon earth I think it's just a phony because it comes alive, new, just like a flower. It starts to smell nice. First of all the buds start to come. It opens into a beautiful flower for a few days, a day. If it's a red rose, in about a week it starts to wither away. The next morning you wake up it's gone. I think that's the way life is on planet Earth.*

Indrea's explanation of the mechanics of how her father was able to communicate with her was related to the idea of momentum:

> *According to Rajneesh, when a child is born the momentum picks up. The way I see it, the human body then becomes alive and sustains itself with food and water and the air, the earth and the heat, the warmth of the sun. That human being then becomes electrically charged, picks up momentum. And when that person dies, the momentum doesn't stop right away, it still animates the human body. I believe that when a person passes on, that aura, or that energy, is still around the human body even though the light has gone out and left the body.*
>
> *The momentum. . . it's just like a little girl standing here full of life and vibrant. When it goes out I still feel an energy, a vibrancy. The momentum is still there. When a person is here and they left the room you can still feel the presence of that person indirectly.*
>
> *I felt he said, "Look after your Mom." I felt like the momentum was there. . . [Then] the momentum [crying]. . .dissipated, just left [crying].*

Indrea believed her father had gone back to the light and that his spirit continued on as an individual, but there was no expectation that their connection would continue now or in the future. And there seems to be little, if any, resolution of her grief following her belief that her father had communicated with her.

Julia

Julia believed her father came because she needed him, *really, really needed him.* And she felt peace after the experience. There had been no doubt that he was with God, but now she was reassured of his love and convinced that he was still reliably there for her. Whenever the need was there she always felt his presence around her. However, before the experience which she accepted as her father's presence, when she felt angry about her father's death she would feel guilty because her father was watching her. After the sensing experience, when she made love to her common-law husband, she again felt guilty again because her father was watching her. Her father had been a very religious man and had wanted all of his children to marry.

Luke

When themes were being verified during the second interview, Luke was quick to confirm that he had received reassurance of his brother's love. However, at the first interview he spent a considerable amount of time recalling the details concerning unresolved issues. This focus indicated there was some residual pain in that dimension. For Luke the belief that his brother had communicated did not necessarily mean that they would meet again. Luke reported that would go through periods where he believed in reincarnation and through periods where he believed that there was nothing beyond death.

I don't know where it came from, or even why it was there. But I think it was really him.

The closest thing I can come to is that it was just his way of saying good-bye. You know, the final good-bye.

I don't think it changed my feelings about death because death, to me, it's an old thing. It's been part of my life for a long time.

Sometimes I think we're like a leaf. You fall off the tree, that's it, and you're gone. But then, do you come as a new leaf the next year? I don't know.

If it's the reincarnation thing then the experience makes a lot of sense. You come back, you finish off any untidy business, and take care of any regrets that you may have had. And you just get to go on to wait for the next but, you know, and go to the next level. Or maybe you don't get a chance to come back. If you've got any regrets, that's too bad. Then maybe you shouldn't have shot all those people. . .or whatever. I think if you're a good person you probably do.

If Matt came back what did he communicate?

Just that he's okay. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Everything's okay.

Will Luke see Matt again?

If when you're dead, you're dead. . . .That's the end of it. . . .If you're one of those people that come back again and you go back to that other level, then chances of running into him, I don't think would happen. Unless we ended up at the same level and died at the same time. I don't know.

He was not completely convinced that the sensing experience meant his brother continued to survive in spirit nor that the experience meant that their relationship would be ongoing. However, he did seem to interpret the experience as evidence that the issues between him and his brother had been resolve.d

Celeste

Initially, Celeste was not reassured of her mother's caring. On the contrary, she initially experienced her mother as an angry presence and reacted with fear. Then, acting on the advice of her mother and father-in-law, she began to deal with her unfinished business and her experience changed:

When I went home the pain was so bad I couldn't eat, I couldn't sleep, I couldn't do nothing. You know, I was going into a real depression. I think maybe this was her way to come back to help me to deal with her death.

I think. . .I made it scary because I was scared to deal with all these things. And I think she came back to help me deal with a lot of issues because I spent a lot of time thinking about why I did all these things and I realized it shouldn't have been done. And then I started thinking about my sexual abuse which I have never, ever, ever, even thought about ever. I didn't even remember it. . .and then I started realizing, I'm going to have to start doing things. I had to heal myself. I had to try to find out where all this was coming from.

And as I was dealing with these things, I noticed I was lifting more out of the depression. And every time I found something else new I knew, "Hey, I can deal with this," I realized my Mom's presence was leaving me. And then I realized before when anything happened I'd go run to Mom. She'll fix it anyway, no matter what happened.

Meanwhile, I was starting to be ready to be on my own. I could look after myself. And then when I started praying and doing the things I'm supposed to be, slowly, gradually, she left me.

It is apparent that Celeste still experiences ambivalence. Her statement, that *she would still be with me in that way* reflects the idea of the sensing experience as an external experience; other statements reflect a belief that the experience was internal. Either way, there was an underlying belief in ongoing connection and it seemed to be that assurance of connection, and the resolution of issues, which led to healing.

I had to forgive myself to let her go. That's how I saw it anyway. I think she forgave me. If she never forgave me, she would still be with me in that way.

Now I can say my mother was a good mother. She did the best she could for us with what she had. And when I learned to let her go that's what I started realizing. She was *a good person. She was* always *good to me.*

Now when I think about her, when I say my good-night to her and stuff like that, I could say it and smile. And I feel she's smiling at me, too.

I knew when my sister passed away [last monthy, when she took her last breath, I prayed for my mother. I told her, "one of your children's coming back to you." And I could accept her death. . . .And I can think about her and the good things; things she used to do, I can laugh about them, the funny things.

Later on I realized it was me talking to myself using her body. I was angry at myself so I used her to hurt me because she was the person I loved the most. I think that's why it was building up to where I couldn't stand myself anymore. I think her presence was there in my mind because I wanted to get her to forgive me for everything I had done and to release me from the guilt.

The experience of presence led Celeste to believe in the Creator. This belief has become an ongoing source of strength for Celeste. Celeste experienced her mother as present in her prayers, and as part of her own being.

A lot of our parents traits are in us. A lot of things they've done and a lot of things they would have done we would do, too, because that's how they are. And I think to myself, "Well, yeah, my Mom would do it this way."

Jane

Jane believed that because her grandmother had come to her as she did, the passing had been easy. She could think of only two reasons for the visit. Her belief in an afterlife was confirmed, and she had been her grandmother's favorite. Thus, she was reassured that her grandmother was all right and still cared for Jane. She was also assured that they would be together again.

Mike

As with other survivors, Mike interpreted Will's presence as a response to a need. Mike believed Will came to give assurance that he was all right. He also believed Will's presence was in response to his own need.

It was his need. He couldn't go without saying he was sorry for a mistake he had made. He felt very guilty about it. And to let me know he'd be all right. I think you have to make amends for your wrongs before you go.

It didn't seem important until then; then it was extremely important that he did that. It felt so right that he had done it.

I wouldn't strike him when he thought he should be struck. I didn't yell at him; I talked to him like another human being. When he did something stupid, I explained to him, next time why doesn't he come to me before he does something like that. That's *what I told him, so he was coming to me. That's maybe one reason why he came, and I forgave him.*

Although Mike had not believed there were an issues to resolve between him and Will, it seemed important that Will had come to say he was sorry, and to give an assurance that he was all right.

Sensing Experiences Facilitate Healing and Spiritual Growth

Sensing experiences were profoundly healing for many of the bereaved who participated in this research project. If a shift from hatred to sorrow is considered to be evidence of healing, then healing effects were reported by all participants. For survivors in this study sensing experiences served to: (1) provide evidence of the transcendence of love and caring; (2) alleviate or mitigate emotional suffering; (3) focus survivors on issues where resolution was needed; (4) provide assurance of the well-being of the deceased; (5) stimulate movement from dissociation, withdrawal, or negativity to engagement; (6) inspire, affirm, or promote the likelihood of belief in an afterlife; (7) serve a protective function against acute grief in other losses; (8) inspire or affirm a belief in a higher being; (9) turn attention to the mysterious; and/or (10) promote faith in intuitive ways of knowing.

Provide Evidence of Transcendence of Love and Caring

Sensing experiences provided evidence to the bereaved that in spite of death, love continued. Whether such experiences were the result of an inner process, as Celeste described, or whether perceptions meant that the deceased was really there, as other participants concluded, experiences of love were meaningful to the survivor. Julia believed that her father came because she *really, really needed him.* Luke was reassured of his brother's love. To Mike, Will's presence meant Will cared about Mike and his family. Celeste, Georgina and Julia experienced the bonds with their deceased as continuing into the present. More than twenty years after the death, Celeste reported:

> *Now when I think about her, when I say my good-night to her and stuff like that, I could say it and smile. And I feel she's smiling at me, too.*

It was apparent that survivors interpreted experiences of presence as responses to their needs. This recognition was usually, but not always, comforting. For Indrea, to accept the possibility that her father had loved her mother was to recognize that to live with hatred was to waste life. This realization appeared to eradicate her hatred for her father but not her sorrow. For most survivors, to conclude that the deceased still cared for them was powerfully healing. Other ways in which this healing was manifested will be discussed in the following sections as further effects are described. However, Frankl's (1959) description of his experience is included here to illuminate the process by which belief in the transcendence of love can promote healing:

> My mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with an uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. Real or not, her look was then more luminous than the sun which was beginning to rise.
>
> A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth. . .that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. . . .I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of the beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right was—an honorable way—in such a position a man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment (p. 48-49).

Alleviate or Mitigate Emotional Suffering

Although love prevailed and connections were unbroken, grief was not necessarily over. For Indrea, hatred for her father was replaced by sorrow for his suffering. For both Julia and Luke, grief, they believed, would never be over. Nevertheless, sensing experiences were often accompanied by profound healing effects on emotions. Luke reported that he felt content after he got over the shock of his experience. He stated that *it was a sad time, but a good time.* Prior to her experiences, Georgina suffered with headaches and dizziness; she was feeling lonely, feeling the need to cry. But she believed that her father *took care of* her feelings for her. With perception of his presence she felt an *overwhelming sense of warmth, and overwhelming sense of peace*. Mike's sadness was replaced by *joy* and *awe*. He described the experience as *amazing*.

After Julia's experience, feelings of anger and turbulence were replaced by feelings of peace and calm:

> *Sometimes you feel so much joy, that he's watching you from up there. And I feel safe. Ever since, I feel safe. I didn't feel that way before that. It was hard. It was like being on a roller-coaster of emotions. I was angry. I was mad. I was mostly angry. I'm positive he came to me because he knew. It did made the pain go away a lot. It sure, sure did. It'll always be there, it'll always be there. But now that I know whenever the need is there I always feel his presence around me. That's what I mean; I feel safe. Ever since then I've always felt safe. I felt peace after that. Calmness. Peace. . . .Whenever the need is there, I always feel his presence around me.*

Focus Survivors on Issues where Resolution is Needed

Sensing experiences were not always immediately comforting. They also motivated survivors to focus on issues where resolution was needed. Luke and Celeste both believed that their experiences of presence were the result of the need to resolve issues and for Celeste frightening experiences continued until her issues were faced. It is interesting that Mike had not believed there were any issues between him and Will until after the experience. Then he reported that it seemed important that Will had come to say he was sorry. *It felt so right that he had done it.*

At the time of the last interview, Julia was experiencing dissonance, probably either because her behavior was out of alignment with her values or because her acceptance of her father's values needed to be examined. When she made love to her common-law husband, she felt guilty because she believed her father was watching her. This reaction may not have been solely because of the sensing experience; she had had a comparable reaction prior to sensing her father's presence. Whenever she had felt angry about her father's death, she would feel guilty because she believed that her father was watching her. Julia's discomfort was not resolved at the time of the final interview. If the discomfort resolved in more complete individuation from her father's values, or in retention of these and behavior changes, these could be considered to be growth responses. Julia could, however choose to leave the issue unresolved.

Provide Assurance of Well-Being of Deceased

Healing was promoted when survivors dealt with issues that had been unresolved. It was also promoted when the bereaved believed the deceased was safe and well. Mike reported feeling relieved that Will was okay now. *He was happy. He was smiling.* Because of the quality of her experience, Jane believed that her grandmother had died peacefully. *I knew she was happy where she was going and she wanted to go. I can honestly say I was happy that she was where she wanted to be.* Luke linked Matt's well-being was linked with a more general well-being. *He's okay. Everything's okay.* This kind of linkage is comparable to Julia's feeling of safety which follows the perception of her father's presence, Together they may constitute evidence of a process similar to that described by Bowlby (1980) in which the world becomes safe when attachment is secure.

Stimulate Movement from Dissociation, Withdrawal or Negativity to Engagement

Survivors reported profound shifts in attitude from dissociation, withdrawal, and negativity to engagement to follow from sensing experiences. As a result of his experience, Luke accepted the reality of his brother's death and began dealing with it. Celeste moved from withdrawal, depression and fear to engagement with issues, healing, and a new self-confidence. Georgina reported that she tended to dwell on her hardships but her sensing experiences showed her that things could be better.

Inspire, Affirm, or Promote the Likelihood of Belief in An Afterlife

A positive attitude was also fostered by a belief in an afterlife. Jane had always believed in an afterlife. For her, sensing experiences meant this belief was confirmed. For Mike, the experience lead to a transformation in spiritual beliefs. Mike reported that his experience showed him there was somewhere you go after you die. He had been brought up as a Christian but always doubted there was a hereafter. His experience convinced him that there was.

I never had another moment like it. I never had one before. And I never had one since. Here is a person who had died, and a week later he's smiling at me.
I had a relieved feeling that he was okay now.
I seen him in the light.
It's almost like he didn't die. He just went away to a place where you can't, you just can't see him now.

For Indrea, sensing experiences were compatible with beliefs in reincarnation and the idea of "momentum" described earlier.

For Luke, the experience did not provide any final answers on the question of an afterlife, however, he stated that reincarnation seemed more explanatory of his experience than a belief in death as a final ending:

If it's the reincarnation thing then the experience makes a lot of sense. You come back, you finish off any untidy business, and take care of any regrets that you may have had. And you just get to go on to wait for the next but, you know, and go to the next level. Or maybe you don't get a chance to come back. If you've got any regrets, that's too bad. Then maybe you shouldn't have shot all those people. . .or whatever. I think if you're a good person you probably do.

Serve a Protective Function against Acute Grief in Other Losses

For survivors who believed in an afterlife, the pain of other deaths was mitigated. When Jane lost her mother, after her experience of her grandmother's presence, she was very sure that her mother was now with her father. Mike reported a similar reaction when his mother died shortly after Will's death. As a result of his sensing experience there was not a doubt in his mind that his mother had gone on to something better.
Celeste, too, reported that when people die who she is close to, she that she won't have to worry about them anymore.

When my sister. . .[died] I did grieve for her. . . This happened a month ago and I can think about her and the good things, like things she used to do. I can laugh about them, the funny things. With my Mom I couldn't do that for a long time, for a long, long time. Every time I thought about her, I'd just block her out. It would hurt me to think about her.

Inspire or Affirm a Belief in an a Higher Being

Just as a belief in an afterlife seemed to follow sensing experiences, so to did a belief in a higher being. This effect was, however, less common for participants in this study. Jane reported that her belief in God was related to her experience:

Oh, yeah, he and I talk frequently. But we talk here [indicates heart]; that's the only place we talk. Sometimes I [feel I get answers]. Just a thought going through my mind that, "No, that's not the way you should do it." Or, "That's exactly how it's going to work." And if I've sort of asked a question then I get an answer. I just think about it and think it out.

While Jane's spiritual beliefs preceded her experience, for Celeste, the experience of presence lead Celeste to a belief in the Creator. This belief has become, for her, an ongoing source of strength.

*I think maybe [*the sensing experience*] helped me to realize there is someone up there.*

I believe in the Creator, that he is *looking after my family up there. The ones that are alive and the ones who are gone, too.*

One night my husband said, "You know, sometimes you spend so much time praying.

I said, "Well, I'm trying to find out how some things go.

He said, "Well, that's what I'm here for."

I said, "Yeah, I could talk to you, but this is different. [Laughter] And, you know, he really laughs about that, too.

Turn Attention to the Mysterious

Most survivors, when attempting to find an explanation of the meaning of their sensing experience, recalled other anomalous experiences. Jane recounted an anecdote passed on to her by her father:

He was in England during the war and he walked into the house where he was billeted and he knew exactly where he was. He said, "I've been here before." He knew where everything was. Somebody would say, "Where is such and such?" and he would go right to it. And he'd never been there, seen that, before.

Indrea asserted that both of her grandfather's were psychic. She recounted one story which did not seem complete unlikely in light of techniques of hypnotic suggestion and biofeedback. It was of an incident in which her uncle had cut himself with a scythe:

My uncle was bleeding, hemorrhaging almost. And my grandfather, who was psychic, said to the blood supply, I guess, or to my uncle, "Stop flowing now." He just commanded the blood to stop flowing. And it did. I just stopped. And the wound was gaping open. The blood stopped immediately. They continued over to the nearest nursing station and arrived in the nick of time. John would have died in about 15 minutes, or 10, or 5, whatever. He just about passed away.

So I believe there's something more than just walking around and talking. There's something. I used to tell my Mom to tell me the story again. My Mom seen it. And my Mom doesn't lie.

Luke recalled several experiences he was unable to explain. He reported that there were strange circumstances surrounding Matt's death which suggested to him that some part of Matt knew something was going to happen. In keeping with his attribution style in considering his sensing experience and his view of the meaning of death, Luke presented his evidence but drew no firm conclusions.

It was almost like he knew something was happening because the day before he died was, I think, their 16th wedding anniversary, or 15th. He took his wife back on that Saturday night to the place where he proposed to her. [They had a] really romantic, really good time. And then they had a barbeque on that Sunday, had my brother over for dinner. And that was the night he died.

And Matt's never believed in life insurance in his whole life. He thought that was the biggest scam on the planet. He had life insurance. [He bought it] in the last year.

There were a lot of weird things that happened that would make me believe he knew something was going on. Even though, you don't, how do you plan a heart attack? You don't.

But then, maybe he just got to the point in his life, too, where he started to mature a little bit. You know, grow up a little bit, he was 37 years old, you know. [Laughs.] Gotta click in sooner or later. Maybe he just started to realize that maybe he does have some responsibilities in life, or that maybe he should start appreciating some of the responsibilities he had in life.

[There's no answers?] Oh, no.

Luke recounted two other incidents for which he could find no explanation. These occurred when he was eighteen and three friends died within three months. First his roommate, Brian, committed suicide.

He was 18 at the time, 17 or 18. I was living with him. We had rented an old house [together] and he shot himself. I was working graveyards that night. And it was really strange. We were unloading coffins out of a boxcar. And I just got a weird feeling. It was not [because]. . .I hadn't unloaded coffins before, we did. So we were unloading coffins and I just got this really weird feeling. I went home the next morning and police cars and everybody was over there. And, "Sorry, Brian shot himself last night."

The second experience occurred after the deaths of David and Rick, who had been Luke's best friends since childhood. David died the night of Rick's wedding. A huge fight broke out at the wedding. David was arrested, thrown face-up in the back of a police car, started vomiting, and choked to death. One month later, to the day, Rick was at a drag race and was killed when a car went off-track and ran over him:

It was a horrible, just a horrible time in my life.

But I was sitting back when I heard the news of Rick. I was sitting in this chair and all of the sudden I closed my eyes for a second and I felt like I was going in a funnel, this huge funnel. And I just kept going and going and going. . . .It was a really strange,

strange experience. I'll never forget that feeling. . . .It was not easy to pull myself out. And I thought, "Well, what did that mean? Like what did that mean?

To go into this thing, it was just indescribable. . . .Wherever it was going, I wasn't going there yet. . . .Wherever it's going, I know I'll be going there someday.

I tried to analyze it for years afterward and I just couldn't come up with anything that would rationalize it completely. I just couldn't. A lot of possibilities, a lot of theories, but that's as far as I got with it. I think about that experience quite a bit. I don't dwell on it, but it's just one of those things that stick in my mind.

Celeste, too, categorized her sensing experience with a mysterious experience. She had once had a dream which seemed to foretell a death. In this dream, a lady in a beautiful, long white flowing gown reached out her hand to Celeste and spoke the name of the nephew of Celeste's future husband. The next morning, after Celeste had described the dream to him, her future husband received a telephone call. His nephew was dead; he had been shot. Celeste reported that the morning after she had dreamed of the lady in long flowing gown, she recalled that they had had a long conversation but upon awakening she could remember none of it except the nephew's name. Over twenty years later, Celeste still recalls this dream:

I've been really thinking about it lots through the years. "Why did she come to me? And what was the message."

To this day I remember her. She was talking to me. And she kept repeating herself and her hands would move. And the gown was moving. . . .And my husband said, "Your eyes were wide awake and you just kept looking," he said. "And I kept shaking you and you wouldn't [wake up]."

I've lost a lot of people since that time. And to this day, I've never had anything like that. That was the two experiences I had.

Promote Faith in Intuitive Ways of Knowing

While most survivors could not explain their anomalous experiences, some had tendency to pay closer attention to them following their sensing experience. Jane reported that she would investigate if she had a sensation that something was wrong:

If something came to me about my brother, I would be phoning him right now. If I had a weird sensation that something was wrong with somebody I would investigate it.

I'm sure of myself. I know what I sense and what I feel, what I see, what I touch.

Mike reported later visual experiences which he regarded as psychic experiences. He believed he was open and accepting toward them because of the sensing experience. He also believed that the ability to "have insights" could be available to anyone and could be very useful if properly utilized.

It opened my mind to the possibility that everybody can have insights. It's fascinating, and it could probably be very useful if a guy knew how to use it right.

On the basis of descriptions presented in this chapter, it has been demonstrated that, for the most successful healing to take place, it was important for survivors to believe that the one mourned was safe and well. Healing was also promoted when the bereaved felt reassured that there was caring, and that the relationship was not over. Thus, experiences interpreted as representing a response from the deceased to a need of the survivor had the most profound and positive impact on the grief process. In these cases the role of the experience in the grief process was perceived as one of support from the deceased in a time of need, reassurance of the well-being of the deceased, resolution of any unresolved issues, and the hope that the relationship would be ongoing in the future. The ways in which sensing experiences promoted healing and spiritual growth were also identified in this chapter. In the final chapter, the findings of this study will be compared to the findings of existing research.

Chapter Nine

DISCUSSION

"Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently."
Rosa Luxemburg (as cited in Andrews, 1993).

"Memory is made as a quilt is made. From the whole cloth of time, frayed scraps of sensation are pulled apart and pieced together in a pattern. . .
Kim Stafford (1991, p.15).

Purpose and Limitations

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the impact of the sensing experience on the grief process by interviewing seven participants. As was demonstrated in Chapter Two, previous research in this area has been primarily quantitative. The incidence of experience was identified for some populations (Balk, 1983; Parkes, 1972; Rees, 1971; Weiner et al, 1996), and some correlates of sensing experiences were found (Lindstrom, 1995; Simon-Buller et al, 1988). Debates concerning the phenomenon seemed to focus on the question of pathology on one hand, and immortality on the other. Only one piece of research (Conant, 1996) had been found in which the thoughts, feelings and beliefs of those who had had a sensing experience were explored. Thus, little was known about the meanings bereaved individuals attached to their experiences, and little was known about the impact of such experiences on the grief process. The current research, undertaken to redress that imbalance, was approached from the perspective of hermeneutic-phenomenological traditions because these traditions supported my intentions. I wanted to focus on description and interpretation of individual experience. In analyzing the data which emerged from conversations with experiencers, it was considered important to recognize the unique while at the same time seeking to identify commonalities of experience. Although the result is one interpretation only, as "any attempt to impose a pattern on the complexity of human feelings must be" (Marris, 1958, p.20), some categories of experience have been described. These categories may not apply to every other situation. My sample size was small and chosen for variation in, and ability to articulate, experience. Therefore, the extent to which findings of this study will apply to other populations will be left to the judgment of the reader and/or to the determination of further research. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the descriptions and interpretations will serve to extend our knowledge of this phenomenon as it is experienced and understood by individual survivors. Furthermore, it is hoped that this research will provide an impetus for further study in this area.

The goals of this study were to (1) to gain an understanding of how people perceive and react to perceived presence of the dead; (2) to gain an understanding of the thoughts and feelings of experiencers; (3) to investigate whether thoughts and feelings are limited to the experience itself or if they arise throughout the grief experience, perhaps effecting the individual's process of recovery; (4) to investigate whether sensing experiences have an impact on the individuals' worldview; and finally, (5) to see how these experiences fit into the whole grief process. To meet the final goal, it was necessary to first describe the grief process. The most important theme which emerged in regard to the grief process was the understanding of the manner in which pain related to other issues is incorporated into the pain of a current loss.

Woundedness

Reactions to grief reported by participants in this study are reactions well-established as common sequelae to grief: crying, anger, sadness, guilt, turmoil, headaches, dizziness (Rando, 1995). The idea that there are factors which compromise the individual's ability to recover from their grief is not new either; Lindemann identified such factors in his study in 1944. The specific factors reported by participants in this research have been observed before: suffering of the deceased, untimely death, unresolved issues between the bereaved and the one mourned, lack of support, and multiple losses (Rando, 1995). The idea of woundedness, however, may extend our knowledge about the process by which these factors become a part of the current grief experience. As survivors in this study responded to their losses, their responses brought them into contact with more pain. This pain was added to the pain caused by the loss.

This finding/interpretation is most comparable to the ideas explicated by Horowitz (1993) and Klass (1996). Horowitz suggests that responses to stressor life events such as loss, fall on an internalized, enduring, and slowly changing knowledge structure (p.263). Person schemas, which "generalize, organize, and retain a great deal of information about the relative roles and attributes of self and others" and schemas of the relationship with the deceased, are pertinent during grief. Such schemas are modified or reschematized during successful mourning. Ambivalent feelings toward the deceased, such as psychological dependency, guilt or anger, are seen as "contradictory and nonintegrated relational schemas" which make schematic revision more difficult. Horowitz further states that, "The mourning process is one of review of a relationship and would activate these contradictory schema" (p.266).

Klass' (1996) explanation has areas of commonality with that of Horowitz (1993). Where Horowitz speaks of schema which need to be modified, Klass speaks of inner representations of the dead which can be established only after separating from the inner representation of the living. Where Horowitz speaks of guilt, Klass speaks of inner representations of "the less-than-good-self" which produce difficulties in grief. According to Klass, parents must separate the sense of self from the inner representation of the living child and come to terms with ambivalence in attachment.

Thus, both Horowitz (1993) and Klass (1996) recognize that unresolved issues of dependency, guilt, or anger become part of the grief and make resolution more difficult. Furthermore, they connect these difficulties to a need to reconstruct meaning in areas related to the relationship with the deceased and the life of the deceased. A discussion of ideas related to meaning will be returned to later.

In this study, the idea of constellations of woundedness includes the process by which the pain related to other factors becomes part of the pain generated by the loss, it is otherwise virtually identical to a view espoused by Rando (1995):

> No individual's grief or mourning occurs in a vacuum. It is influenced, shaped, and determined by a constellation of factors that renders each mourner's response as unique as his or her fingerprint (p.221).

The factors Rando identifies include those identified in this study and numerous others. For her, these factors make up the constellations. In this study, however, the idea of constellations of grief emerged from a recognition that pain from past assaults was carried forward into and became part of the pain of bereavement. Each particular constellation was also a cohesive story by which each survivor assigned meaning to her/his experiences. As this part of the grief process is identified, one step is taken toward one stated goal of this research, that of placing the sensing experience within the grief process. In completing this goal, one important theme of this study emerges. This theme is particularly important in fulfilling two other goals of this study: the goal of understanding how people perceive and react to sensing experiences, and the goal of understanding whether the experiences have an impact on the survivor's worldview.

Grief in Context

The one theme which emerges in this study as central to all themes is that, to understand the grief process and the place of sensing experiences within grief processes, it is necessary to attend to individual voices. We attend to the voices of the bereaved voice by listening to their stories. These stories are important because it is in the richness of life lived and of connection from which the survivors gather strength. Or, it is the barrenness of life lived and the lack of connection which made so difficult the task of finding meaning in the life, and achieving acceptance and peace with the reality of the death.

There is support in psychological literature for this finding. Grumet (1991), in seeking to illuminate the importance of storytelling, speaks of the "power of the act that designates meaning" (p.68). Lopez (1989), identifies the power of narrative as the power "to nurture and heal, to repair a spirit in disarray" (as cited in Witherell & Noddings, p.5). Heilbrun (1988) states that, "decisions as to which stories will be told and which suppressed not only give definition to a life but serve as a form of power" (as cited in Witherell & Noddings, p.1) . Witherall and Noddings clarify the nature of this power as "the power by which we live and invent our lives" (p.1). To seize the opportunity to assign personal meaning is to take a step toward living with intentionality:

> [To compose a story] is to give a life intelligibility by placing it on a meaningful continuum containing a past, a present and a future, which are linked by. . .[the quality of] intentionality. [And it is intentionality which] makes it possible for people to plot the course of their lives according to

> their own choices, rather than in reaction to the initiatives of others (Parry & Doan, 1994, p.3).

The critical importance of allowing the bereaved to designate meaning in their grief processes, is made clear by those who describe the impact of silencing of voice. Lorde (1980) describes this silencing as an act of oppression (as cited in Parry & Doan, 1994). Parry and Doan (1994) perceive silencing of voice as a form of "terrorism":

> We use such a strong word advisedly, for when one person tries to silence the legitimate voice of another this is done invariably by throwing into question that person's only resource for discerning reality, her/his own judgment. All those who are thrown into that position of self-doubt are being thrown out of their own stories and robbed of their own voices (p.3).

Thus, when people are given the opportunity to tell their own stories, they are given power: the power to designate meaning (Grumet, 1991), to discern their own reality and to give their lives intelligibility (Parry & Doan, 1994), the power to invent their lives (Heilbrun as cited in Witherell & Noddings, 1991) and to nurture and heal themselves (Lopez as cited in Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

The most convincing author of the idea that suffering may be transcended by making it meaningful is Viktor Frankl (1959) because he applied it successfully under the most horrific of circumstances, the Nazi death camp. Frankl (1959) ennobles the sufferer by challenging her/him to suffer well when suffering is inevitable. He asserts that when all other freedoms have been taken away, people may still chose their attitudes.

In light of this perspective, the process which Freud (1917/1961) described by which each memory and hope is brought up and hypercathected (p.154), instead of being a process by which the bereaved detach the libido from the deceased, may be seen as a process by which the bereaved reinvent the stories of their lives. The need of the bereaved to tell and retell their stories is understandable if this is the process by which meaning is made and the world can again be understood. Parkes (1972) makes an observation which supports this idea:

> [The bereaved display a] need to 'make sense' of what has happened, to explain it, to classify it along with other comparable events, to make it fit into one's expectations of the world. . . Trying out new solutions, searching for clues to explain 'why did it happen to me?', and repeatedly, monotonously, remembering the sequence of events leading up to the death – these are what make up the process of grief work (p.124-125).

Researchers (Lindemann, 1944, Rando, 1995) recognize that bereavement represents a loss of meaning: "The bereaved is surprised to find how large a part of his customary activity was done in some meaningful relationship to the deceased and has now lost its significance (Lindemann, p.142)." Lindemann notes that when people become willing to accept the grief process and embark on a program of dealing in memory with the deceased person, there seems to be "a rapid relief of tension," animated conversations ensue, the deceased are idealized, and misgivings about future adjustment worked through (p.143). Attig's (1996) discussion returns us to the idea of story; he stresses that, "part of what it is to be a person is to embody. . .a life story," and asserts that people find identity as their stories unfold (p.7).

Responses to Grief

In the responses which emerged from the data in this research, there is evidence that the grief process is one of making meaning: of loss, of suffering, of relationship, of life and death, of the life of the deceased, and the ongoing life of the survivor. These findings support the ideas of Horowitz (1993) concerning reschemization and the ideas of Klass (1996) concerning inner representations, both discussed earlier in the section on "Woundedness". They also support Rando's (1995) opinion that cognitive aspects have been neglected in discussions on bereavement in favor of emotional aspects. Rando understands grief as "the process of experiencing the psychological, behavioral, social, and physical reactions to the perception of loss" (p.220). Mourning, for Rando, and includes the conscious and unconscious processes and courses of action that promote three operations: (1) undoing the psychosocial ties that bind the mourner to the loved one, with the eventual facilitation of the development of new ties; (2) revision of the assumptive world, adoption of new roles, skills and behaviors, and development of a new identity; and (3) attempting to move adaptively into the new world through the adoption of new ways of being in that world and the ultimate reinvestment in people, objects, roles, hopes, beliefs, causes, ideals, goals, or pursuits (p.219-220). Thus, Rando, asserts, mourning requires a more cognitive focus:

> A majority of the writers discussing bereavement have focused almost exclusively on the affective or emotional aspects of the mourner's journey throughout the three phases of grief and mourning. Although this domain is of critical importance, the relative neglect of the cognitive aspects of adaptation to loss has resulted in a significant disservice to mourners. Human beings are cognitive animals and, as such, need to process loss from that perspective as well as from the emotional.

The emphasis on meaning may have emerged in this study because the time elapsed since loss in all cases exceeded seven months. For Rando (1995) the process of "revising the assumptive world" is a focus in the third and final stage of grief and mourning, the accommodation phase. However, Viney (1991), in explicating the approach to loss of personal construct theorists, rather than focussing on a required sequence of stages, expects there to be parallel processes of mourning (p.139). This viewpoint is seen as making the therapist more able to be responsive to individual needs. Personal construct theory, then, is also supported by the finding in this research that the grief process is one in which the bereaved heal themselves by reinventing their lives:

> [Kelly became convinced] that people live their lives on the basis of a system of interpretations, each individual having a unique system. These interpretations or constructs are used both to make sense of the past and present and to anticipate the future. . . .The construct system of each individual changes during his or her lifetime. "All of our present interpretations of the universe are subject to revision or replacement (Kelly, 1955). . . .The most important. . .value of a person's construct system lies not in how accurately it mirrors "reality," but how well is [it] explains past and predicts future life events (p.140).

In the personal construct approach, the loss experience must be assimilated by the old construct system, or accommodation must take place: the construct system must changed in order to adapt to the experience (p.149-150).

Sensing Experiences

The above discussion is important in identifying a context for the central question. What is the lived-experience of perceiving the presence of the deceased during grief? This question is closely related to another which is a focus of current discussion by theorists. What is the proper place of the deceased in ongoing meaning of the lives of the bereaved? Sensing experiences, as evidence of ongoing interaction with, or attachment to, the deceased become part of this debate. For many writers, sensing experiences are indications of a denial of death (Horowitz, 1993; Raphael, 1983, as cited in Klass, 1996, Viney, 1991). Others consider them to serve a useful role (Conant, 1996; Klass, 1996; Marwit & Klass, 1996).

For all participants in this research, with one exception, the experiences of presence were ultimately beneficial. Even Celeste's experience, initially frightening, utilized as part of a creative coping strategy, promoted healing. In this study, then, the primary finding concerning sensing experiences is that their impact on grief is usually positive and potentially profound. This impact seems to be directly correlated to the nature of the meaning attribution. Sensing experiences played a healing role where the following interpretations were made: (1) that the well-being of the deceased was assured; (2) that the deceased cared for the survivor; (3) that interpersonal issues had been resolved or no longer mattered; (4) that the connection was ongoing.

Beneficial aspects of the sensing experience have been identified by earlier researchers. Marris (1958) was one early observer of the importance of attachment to the bereaved:

> The bereaved dream vividly of the dead, seem to see and hear them, or sense their presence, and cannot believe that they are dead. These reminders continually revive distress, but they are not consistently avoided. On the contrary, the bereaved often cherish their memories, even though they arouse painful associations.

> Only as he recovers confidence that he loved and was loved, and secures his memories against these fears, is he able to review his life in the light of a reconciliation to his loss (p.24, 29).

Bowlby (1980) recognized the importance of connection for the preservation of identity:

> Half or more of widows and widowers reach a state of mind in which they retain a strong sense of the continuing presence of their partner without the turmoils of hope and disappointment, search and frustration, anger and blame that are present earlier. . . .In many cases, it seems, the dead spouse is experienced as a companion who accompanies the bereaved everywhere. . . .there is no reason to regard any of these experiences as either unusual or unfavourable, rather the contrary. . . .it seems likely that *for many widows and widowers it is precisely because they are willing for their feelings of attachment to the dead spouse to persist that their sense of identity is preserved and they become able to recognize their lives along lines they find meaningful*. That for many bereaved people this is the preferred solution to their dilemma has for too long gone unrecognized [emphasis mine] (as cited in Peskin, 1993, p.990).

For participants in this study the benefits of experience were (1) to provide evidence of the transcendence of love and caring; (2) to alleviate or mitigate emotional suffering; (3) to focus survivors on issues where resolution was needed; (4) to provide assurance of the well-being of the deceased; (5) to stimulate movement from dissociation, withdrawal, or negativity to engagement; (6) to inspire, affirm, or promote the likelihood of belief in an afterlife; (7) to serve a protective function against acute grief in other losses; (8) to inspire or affirm a belief in a higher being; (9) to turn attention to the mysterious; and/or (10) to promote faith in intuitive ways of knowing. Thus, sensing experiences promoted healing and spiritual growth.

These healing effects identified above are comparable to and extend those identified by Conant (1996) and Devers (1997). Conant (1996), who described sensing experiences as internal experiences, identified roles which changed over time. She observed that perceptions of presence were experienced as a type of caring by the deceased; a recognition of the survivors importance in the life of the deceased and the permanence of connection. According to Conant, when sensing experiences function in a positive manner they can: (1) serve as a safe haven to help mend the trauma of the loss; (2) as an inner voice to lessen current social isolation; and (3) as an internal reworking of self to meet new realities; and (4) as reassurance of the possibility of immortality. In summary, Conant observes, "The memory and images of the deceased were a source of current strength when affirming permission to move on in life while maintaining meaning in the past."

The Conant study included widows who had not had sensing experiences and it was possible to compare outcomes for those having and not having sensing experiences.

This dimension was not addressed in the current study. Her observation, concerning the differences in grief outcomes with and without sensing experiences, was that:

> The widows who continued to have vivid illusions of perceiving the deceased did not differ from other widows in the study in their acceptance of death, apparent self-esteem, or movement to building a new life. They also did not seem to be more isolated socially or to perceive themselves as more abandoned. They seemed rather to be better at this style of expressing grief, more accepting of it and more convinced of its meaning. The pain of loss continued for all of them as these widows moved on to new work and new relationships and felt increased purpose in living.
>
> Sense of presence may be more likely when mortal threats are present, when communication of feelings of grief is discouraged, or when the widow feels helpless. However, sense of presence also represents positive coping with existential issues and transformation of the internal relationship, and as such need not be seen as a symptom of anything (p.194).

Devers (1997), whose research I discovered after my own was begun, described sensing experiences as after-death communications and identified them as therapeutic for survivors in (1) developing internal relationships with the deceased; (2) facilitating resolution of conflicts associated with these relationships; (3) easing the grief of other deaths; (4) providing a message to the survivor that life is not meaningless or hopeless but sacred; and (5) leading the survivor through connection with the deceased to a connection with the higher self. These findings, like Conant's (1996) support those of the current research.

Neither Devers (1997) nor Conant (1996) specifically examined outcome as a function of meaning attribution. However, Conant noted that two widows who experienced more astonishing and unbidden contacts throughout their grief and whose contacts continued into the second year were particularly successful in their grief processes:

> Both of these widows demonstrated. . .increased happiness in daily life, interest and attachment to new goals and activities, new friends, positive shifts in self-concept, altering the house, and a returning sense of purpose in living. Another difference for these two widows is that they were more involved than the others in performing music, practicing the visual arts, and in religious practice. . . (p.188-189).

Conant also noted that two women "were consistently committed to the belief that this was communication with the husband's spirit"(p.189). She does not, however, inform us whether or not these are the same two widows.

Thus, past attachments move into the present and the future in spite of death. The survivor's very identity is involved in the process of making the past and the present flow together with a coherent continuity of meaning. If the deceased had a meaningful role in the past, she will inevitably be part of the meaning found in the survivor's ongoing story.

Implications for Future Research

It would be fascinating to further explore, through qualitative methods, the role of the sensing experiences in the process by which the bereaved designate meaning and heal their lives. In the Conant (1996) study grief processes of those having and not having sensing experiences were compared. Further study in this area would be useful. Conant (1996) also observed that attributions concerning such experiences changed over time in her study. A longitudinal study, with a larger population, of the lived-experiences of this phenomenon would be useful in identifying how healing proceeds as attributions evolve. As mentioned in Chapter One, Morse (1994) observed that family members have difficulty with the question of why some of them have these "death-related visitations" while others do not. He further noted that experiences can lead to difficulties as different family members impose different value judgments and spiritual interpretations on the experiences. For these reasons it would be useful to study the effects of sensing experiences on family functioning. It would also be useful to identify correlates of sensing of presence in relation to such factors as closeness of relationship, coping styles and character of the death. In regards to individual differences, Conant (1996) found that those who had sensing experiences were more involved in artistic pursuits, including music and the visual arts, and more involved in religious practice. Conant suggests that it may be this difference in style of processing which predisposes them to nonverbal image experience (p.189). This is an area where there has been no research, to my knowledge, and one which would be intriguing to pursue. A final area where research could be rewarding, is that of the sensing experience as part of individual understandings of spirituality and/or spiritual development.

Implications for Counselling

The most important finding of this study relates to the fulfillment of the initial goals of the research: (1) to gain an understanding of how people perceive and react to sensing experiences; (2) to investigate whether the thoughts and feelings arise throughout the grief process and effect the process of recovery; and (3) to investigate whether sensing experiences have an impact on the individual's worldview. The research process has become a process of opening the mind. I began this study with the view that this kind of experience was slightly bizarre, and concluded with the view that it is a natural and normal experience which can have profound healing effects during grief process and can change the worldview in a way that promotes spiritual growth.

I first heard about Luke's experience long before the first interview. His wife, a friend of mine who knew about my research, phoned to tell me about his experience and ask what it meant. Both seemed concerned about his mental functioning. Had I not already done extensive reading in the area, I may have been concerned, too. As it was, I was able to reassure them that such experiences are considered to be a normal part of grief.

Thus, the most important benefit of this research is that a perspective has been presented from which these, and perhaps other similar kinds of experiences, may be viewed as natural, normal and even creative. Because of the findings presented here, I, and other counsellors, may be better able to encourage a climate where clients feel free to disclose their sensing experiences and learn that they are not uncommon. Rather, they often a normal part of the grief process. In this way, fears, such as those expressed by Luke, could be allayed and the therapeutic relationship advanced. Counsellors may also be able to encourage clients to view their sensing experiences as creative and positive and/or spiritually nourishing.

For participants in this study, where the grief process involved an incorporation of other woundings, a discussion of sensings experiences immediately focussed the conversation on these areas. This would seem to indicate that, where the bereaved have had a sensing experience, whether it was viewed as positive or negative, discussions about it would be very useful. While findings of this study may not be applicable in all other situations, the evidence here suggests that, by focussing on the sensing experience, counsellors might more easily discover areas in which the grief process might be blocked, for example, by unresolved issues in the survivors relationship with the deceased.

In Chapter One, I suggested that these experiences might be useful if conceived of as material from the subconscious. Celeste's initial experience exemplifies how this process could be utilized. When she accepted her sensing experience as something she needed to listen to, and confronted the experience, she was unaware of sexual abuse issues. They surfaced only after she had asked forgiveness from her deceased mother. Celeste took an experience that was initially very frightening and actively working with it, turned it into a tool for healing.

And thus, this research is offered in the hope that counsellors will gain some understandings about sensing experiences which will enable them to facilitate these and other similar processes for their clients. In this way clients may be able to receive reassurance that will allay possible fears, they may find a place to discuss a phenomenon which few of the public understand, they may receive help in adjusting emotionally to their experiences, and they may become involved in a fascinating exploration of the spiritual and/or subconscious dimension of their lives.

The goals of this study have been fulfilled. Some understanding has been reached about (1) how people perceive and react to sensing experiences; (2) the immediate thoughts and feelings people have concerning their experiences; (3) the ways in which these thoughts and feelings effect the process of recovery; (4) the impact experiences have on the individual's worldview; and (5) how experiences fit into the grief process. And yet, this is only one interpretation of the experiences of a small group of people. Many questions have yet to be answered. Greater depth of understanding can best be achieved through further qualitative research. Nevertheless, I am satisfied that a step has been taken toward receiving these experiences as beneficial rather than labelling them as symptoms of pathology. Perhaps inquiry into the cause of these experiences has been misdirected. Perhaps the important area to explore is not where they originate but where they can lead. As Einstein asserted,

> There are only two ways to live. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as if everything is (as cited in Peck, 1996).

These experiences can be an assurance that, in some sense, love does not end with death. In the words of Mary Jones (1988):

> I found I simply had the habit of loving, and death made no difference at all. The machinery spun on, free-wheeling, even though the motor had stopped. . . . (p.35).
>
> I keep saying, "There is not death." This is nonsense. Of course, there is death. But death. . .was not what I expected or imagined, although since I had never really thought about it before, I cannot say exactly what I had expected.
>
> What I do know now is that death is not an end. A change, yes; immense and profound but not an end. . . . (p.48).

Though lovers shall be lost love shall not;
And death shall have no dominion.
Dylan Thomas
(as cited in Andrews, 1993, p.22)

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Appendix A

Research Study

Request for Participation

Project Title: **Death-Related Experiences: Voices of the Bereaved**

Investigator: **Gwenyth Olive Windsor**
Department of Educational Psychology, University of Alberta

As a normal part of grief, the bereaved often report sensing experiences, that is seeing, hearing, being touched by, or feeling the presence of the deceased. The purpose of this research is to gain insight into the effects of sensing experiences upon the grieving process. It is hoped that this information will assist counsellors in intervening more effectively with individuals who have had such experiences.

By participating in this study you may be taking an opportunity to reflect on your experience(s) as well as to contribute to therapeutic understanding of these experiences and consequently to better interventions in bereavement counselling.

Participation would potentially involve three meetings, scheduled at your convenience:

(a) a brief meeting to introduce the project to you, to address any concerns or questions you may have, and to obtain your consent to participate;
(b) an interview of about one hour in length to discuss your experience and the effects it has had on your grief experience;
(c) a follow-up meeting may be required to gather further information, to check for accuracy, and/or to offer any additional information.

If you prefer, the first and second meetings may be combined. During the interviews, you will be asked about your sensing experiences as they relate to the loss and the impact of the experiences on your grief process. As well, you will be asked about how you understand and are effected by these experiences now. These interviews are not intended to be therapy sessions, but rather an opportunity for you to tell your story as part of the proposed research project.

To participate in this study, you must be an English-speaking adult (eighteen years of age or older) who has experienced loss through death and who has had, in connection to this loss, a sensing experience which is clear in your memory. If you are interested in participating or learning more about this study, please contact me at the following number: 458-0800.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Project Title: Death-Related Experiences: Voices of the Bereaved

Investigator: Gwenyth Windsor **Telephone: 458-0800**

The purpose of this research project is to gain insight into the nature of sensing experiences and the effects of the experiences on the grieving process.

I may accept or decline to participate and am free to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty. Participation will involve two or three interviews of approximately one hour each. During these interviews, questions will be asked about my sensing experience(s) and its/their impact upon my grieving process.

I agree to be interviewed and understand that interviews will be audio-taped and the tapes transcribed with identifying information changed. All tape recordings and transcripts will be stored in a secure place, along with other relevant data that is shared with the researcher. At the completion of research all audio-tapes will be erased. I understand that the information will be used solely for research purposes and published in the form of a thesis or otherwise and that my name will not be associated with the research.

These interviews are not intended to be therapy sessions but rather opportunities to tell my story as part of the proposed research. From the information which I give, new perspectives on the impact of sensing experiences on grieving and on counselling approaches to grieving may emerge.

I understand that I am free not to answer specific questions. I also understand that I can withdraw my consent and terminate my participation at any time without prejudice or penalty.

I have been given an opportunity to ask whatever questions I want and all such questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Signature of Participant ________________________________

Signature of Researcher ________________________________

Date ____________________

Appendix C

Interview Guide

The following questions may be asked, however, it is intended that the interview be guided by the participant's process with as little interference from the researcher as possible. Furthermore, questions may be changed as research progresses and themes emerge.

Background

1. Pseudonym of participant.
2. Date of loss.
3. Age at time of loss, of deceased; of participant.
4. Time elapsed since loss.
5. Relationship of participant to deceased.
6. Are you a religious person?

History of Loss

1. How did the person die?
2. Did you have any forewarning?
3. During the three years prior to the loss how would you describe the nature of your relationship to the person who died?
4. Sometimes after a loss, people feel they have left things unsaid or have said or done things they wish they hadn't? Do/did you have any unfinished business with the deceased?
5. What was the most difficult for you to deal with as a result of the loss?
6. Do you feel you had the support you needed at the time and following the loss?

Sensing Experiences

1. How would you describe your sensing experience?
2. What were you thinking and feeling as this experience unfolded?
3. Did your sensing experience take place immediately after the death?
4. How long did the experience last?
5. Was yours a single isolated experience or did you have experiences that went on for a period of time?
6. What do(es) these(this) experience(s) mean to you about the loss?
7. Did thoughts and feelings about the experience(s) continue to effect you throughout your grief experience?
8. Have you changed the way you think about life and/or death as a result of this(these) experience(s)?
9. Is there anything that you feel we missed about this experience or what it meant to you?

Recovery from loss/Debriefing

1. To what degree would you say you have been able to recover from this loss?
2. Do you feel that the sensing experience(s) effected your recovery process?
3. Do you need some help now? [Offer of referral if appropriate.]
4. What was it like to share your experience in this interview?
5. If you had an opportunity to participate in a study like this again, would you do so?
6. Do you have anything further you would like to express?